

New Anti-Pius XII Book by an Old Critic

by Ronald Rychlak

(Catalyst 5/2004)

During World War II and for years after it ended, Pope Pius XII was heralded as a staunch opponent of the Nazis and a champion of their victims. Then in 1963, as the result of a piece of fiction written by German playwright Rolf Hochhuth, a controversy arose about whether the Pope had been sufficiently outspoken about Nazi atrocities. One of the earliest papal critics of this era was Robert Katz. In his 1967 *Death in Rome* and in his 1969 *Black Sabbath*, Katz severely criticized Pope Pius XII for failing to take a firmer stand in opposition to the Nazis.

After the controversy re-erupted in the past few years, with the publication of several new books, authors like John Cornwell and Susan Zuccotti were justifiably criticized for relying on Katz's work, which pre-dated the extensive release of Vatican documents on this subject.

Now, in *The Battle for Rome: The Germans, the Allies, the Partisans, and the Pope* (Simon and Schuster: New York 2003) Katz re-asserts his old charges. Not only does he cite his out-dated books for authority, but coming full circle, he relies upon Zuccotti and Cornwell who had relied upon him! In fact, at one point (p. 54), Katz refers to a charge made by "one historian." Flipping to the endnotes, one finds an abbreviation. Only by further flipping to Katz's key does the reader learn that Katz's "historian" is journalist (not historian) John Cornwell and his discredited book, *Hitler's Pope*.

One of the reasons why serious scholars have avoided Katz's

earlier books is because of a lawsuit that was filed by Pope Pius XII's niece, Elena Rossignani. The Italian Supreme Court ruled that: "Robert Katz wished to defame Pius XII, attributing to him actions, decisions and sentiments which no objective fact and no witness authorized him to do." Katz was fined 400,000 Lire and given a 13-month suspended prison sentence.

In his new book, Katz discounts that lawsuit, noting that because of an amnesty, the litigation was ruled moot. That may be a legal defense, but it does not negate the two separate findings on the merits against Katz, and those findings should be sufficient to warn readers about the legitimacy of (and motivation behind) Katz's work.

Katz focuses on the period when German troops occupied Rome. The first important Vatican-related event took place in October 1943, when the Nazis rounded up about 1,200 Roman Jews for deportation. Katz concludes that the Allies had advance notice of the planned roundup and that Pope Pius had at least an unsubstantiated warning of it.

Katz reports that a copy of a German telegram revealing the Nazi order for the roundup of Jews was passed on to President Franklin Roosevelt. Only by consulting the notes at the back of the book, however, does one learn that the telegram reached Roosevelt nearly three months after the roundup. Katz's case against Pope Pius XII, who had offered gold to pay a ransom to the Germans to prevent deportations, is even weaker. (Katz even faults Pius for making this offer, because it may have dissuaded some Jews from going into hiding!)

Katz claims that the German Ambassador to the Holy See, Ernst von Weizsaecker urged the Pope to make "an official protest" on the day that the Jewish people were arrested. In support of this claim, Katz cites a telegram sent by the Consul at the German embassy to the Quirinal [seat of the Italian government] to the Foreign Office in Berlin. This telegram,

however, was sent nine days before the roundup and said nothing about any plan urged on the Vatican.

In a conversation that Weizsaecker had with the Vatican Secretary of State on the day of the arrests, the ambassador expressly urged the Pope *not* to openly protest, since a protest would only make things worse. In fact, thanks in part to Vatican intervention, about 200 prisoners were freed. Moreover, there were no further mass arrests of Roman Jews (thousands of whom—with papal support—went into hiding in Church properties). Obviously, Pius acted with the best interest of the victims in mind.

The second event on which Katz focuses took place on March 23, 1944 after Italian partisans set off a bomb which killed 33 members of the German police. Hitler ordered the immediate execution of ten prisoners for every soldier killed. Within hours, 335 prisoners (most of whom were not Jewish; one was a priest) were led to the catacombs on the outskirts of Rome and shot. The massacre took place in complete secrecy.

Katz argues that the Pope knew of the retaliation in advance but that he did nothing to help. He cites as “proof” a memorandum that was received at the Vatican on March 24, about five hours before the prisoners were killed. That memo, which was published by the Vatican in 1980, said that “it is however foreseen that for every German killed 10 Italians will be executed.”

First of all, this memo probably did not make it all the way to the Pope prior to the executions. More importantly, Pope Pius XII certainly was well aware of the likelihood of brutal Nazi retaliation before he got this memo, which provided no specific details or new information. In fact, historian Owen Chadwick cited the document as proof that Pius XII obviously did not know details of the reprisal.

When the memorandum made its way to him, Pius sent a priest to obtain more information and release of the prisoners. The

Gestapo chief of police, however, would not receive the Pope's messenger. The executions were already underway. That officer (Herbert Kappler) testified during his post-war trial that "Pope Pius XII was not aware of the Nazis' plans before the massacre."

Katz's efforts to defame Pius XII are evident from the very beginning of this book. The text starts with a report from the Roman police chief on the activity of the clergy and Catholic Organizations. It says, "The clergy continues to maintain an attitude of cooperation with the Government." Since the book is about the era of Nazi occupation, one might think that the Church was in cahoots with the Germans. The date of the report, however, is *prior* to the Nazi occupation.

Katz suggests that Pius should have approved of rebel efforts to murder Nazis. At the same time, he suggests that the Pope should have participated in a funeral for murdered Nazis. He also criticizes Pius for his efforts to bring about peace. Additionally, Katz seems to think that the Pope should have behaved differently when the victims were Italian Catholics as opposed to Jews. Can you imagine the justifiable criticism if the Pope had done that?

Katz would have the reader believe that Sir Francis D'Arcy Osborne, British Minister to the Holy See from 1936 to 1947, was a critic of Pius. In fact, following the war Osborne wrote that "Pius XII was the most warmly humane, kindly, generous, sympathetic (and, incidentally, saintly) character that it has been my privilege to meet in the course of a long life."

Similarly, Katz wants us to believe that the U.S.

representative in the Vatican, Harold Tittman, was a papal critic. Tittman's son, however, is working on his father's memoirs, and he reports that the U.S. representative held a very favorable opinion of Pius XII's policies. Most

preposterous of all is the attempt to suggest that Domenico Cardinal Tardini held Pius in low regard. One only need consult Tardini's loving tribute, *Memories of Pius XII*, to see

the falseness of that charge.

Katz contends that Pius was prejudiced not only against Jews but also against blacks. He cites a British memorandum indicating that after the liberation of Rome, the Pope requested that “colored troops” not be used to garrison the Vatican. This canard stems from a report the Pope received about French Moroccan troops. They were particularly brutal, raping and looting wherever they went. The Pope did not want these specific soldiers stationed in Rome (or anywhere else). He expressed his concerns about these men to British Ambassador Osborne, who broadened the statement in his cable back to London, saying that the Pope did not want “colored troops” stationed at the Vatican.

The Pope’s concern about these specific French Moroccan troops is made clear in a declassified confidential memorandum from the OSS, an article that appeared in the Vatican newspaper, and a message sent from the Vatican to its representative in France. None of these documents make reference to race, just the Pope’s concern over these specific French Moroccan troops. (Although Katz did not know how they played into this story, even he noted the outrageous brutality of these soldiers.)

Katz assails Pope Pius IX as an anti-Semite; incorrectly asserts that Pius XII favored the Germans over the Soviets in World War II; calls Pius XII pompous; mocks the Chief Rabbi of Rome (who praised Pius XII); accepts self-serving testimony from Nazi officers over Jewish and Catholic witnesses; repeats stories that have been shown to be false; gives inaccurate interpretations to papal statements; cites rumors that suggest the Pope was prepared to flee Rome; and takes every cheap shot that he can.

Of those who support Pius XII, Katz writes: “The Pope’s defenders can do no better than cite decades-old research of deflated credibility....” That, of course, is preposterous. All kinds of new evidence has come to light in the past year with

the opening of new archives. Every bit of it supports the view that Pius XII and the Vatican leadership were opposed to the Nazis and did what they could to help all victims, Jewish or otherwise.

One final error made by Katz: He reports at the end of the book that Ronald J. Rychlak is a “non-Catholic lawyer and professor at the University of Mississippi School of Law, now Pius’s staunchest supporter.” I am and always have been Catholic.

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Popular Thriller Reprises Pius XII Slanders

by Kenneth D. Whitehead

(Catalyst 7/2003)

*Daniel Silva, The Confessor,
New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2003.
HB; 401 pages. \$29.95.*

What Notre Dame philosophy professor Ralph McInerny has aptly called “the defamation of Pius XII”—in his excellent book with that title—has unfortunately been so widely successful in the culture at large that many people simply take it for granted that Pope Pius XII was guilty of a grave historical wrong in not speaking out more strongly against Adolf Hitler’s efforts

to exterminate the Jews. The recent film "Amen," by movie director Constantin Costa-Gravas, like the earlier play on which it is based, Rolf Hochhuth's "The Deputy," depicted Pius XII as a virtual accomplice in his willingness to mute public criticism of Hitler and the Nazis. Supposedly, the wartime pope was willing to remain silent both because he was pro-German and because he was acting in the interests of combating Communism through the advance of the German army into the Soviet Union. Pius XII is also severely criticized as well for maintaining Vatican neutrality in the war at a time when, as a moral leader, many say, he should have been more vigorously speaking out against the evil of the Nazis' "final solution." Evil the Nazis' final solution assuredly was. The alleged guilty silence and passivity of Pope Pius XII in the face of it is something else again, however, something a vast contemporary literature has examined in great detail. Far from the case against Pius XII having been proved by the various anti-Pius writers, though, rather the contrary has turned out to be the case: the less highly touted pro-Pius writers really have the better of the argument, as the present writer among others has shown in a review-article covering the principal recent anti-Pius and pro-Pius books (this review-article is available [here](#)).

The fact that the case against Pius XII does not hold up on the evidence—that the continuing denigration of the wartime pope is a defamation—has not prevented those convinced of the pope's guilt from going ahead to trumpet it to the four winds anyway. Such is the approach of the recent book by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair*. Goldhagen relies on sources whose evidence has been shown to be thin, shaky, biased, unsubstantiated, and even patently false—and then he goes on to accumulate many more errors of fact and judgment of his own. Just as the myths of Aryan racial superiority and Jewish racial pollution drove the Nazi extermination program, so the myth of the supposed complicity

of Pius XII in the crimes of the Nazis drives the continuing campaign to vilify the good and honorable pope and man that Pius XII was. A scapegoat is needed to explain the failure of European civilization to counter the murderous ideology of the Nazis, and so the wartime head of the Catholic Church is targeted.

One of the newest entries into the field of Pius XII defamation is a new thriller novel entitled *The Confessor* written by Daniel Silva. It appeared on the New York Times bestseller list almost as soon as it was published. Its author has enjoyed a growing reputation as a writer of popular thrillers, and he is, in fact, a skilled practitioner of the genre. In two recent books of his, *The Kill Artist* and *The English Assassin*, he introduced a superhero operative, Gabriel Allon, who is a talented restorer of fine paintings by day but is also a clandestine Israeli agent who always turns out to be more than a match for the Arab terrorists he encounters preying on Jewish victims. In *The Confessor*, however, the predators pursuing Jewish and other victims are no longer Arab terrorists; they are traditionalist Catholics operating out of the Vatican in an effort to cover up the evidence of Church collaboration with the Nazis in World War II.

The novel's action is based on the taken-for-granted "fact" of the culpable silence of Pius XII during the Holocaust against the Jews as well as upon the true fact that some individual churchmen were pro-Nazi. It would have been surprising if there had not been a few pro-Nazi churchmen, considering that the mesmerizing Adolf Hitler once held a good part of Europe in his thrall, and for more than just a few years. Probably a majority of Germans continued to consider him the savior of Germany well past the time when it had become pretty clear that what he was bringing about was the ruin of Germany.

That some individual churchmen were pro-Nazi, and a few even actively collaborated in the atrocities of Hitler's so-called New Order, however, in no way establishes that the Vatican's

policy was even remotely pro-Nazi. That the contrary, in fact, has conclusively been shown in, e.g., Pius XII and the Second World War: According to the Archives of the Vatican by Pierre Blet, S.J., has simply not registered with a writer such as Daniel Silva. He relies on the anti-Pius sources instead. His main plot is based on a supposed secret wartime meeting between an archbishop high up in the Vatican and an official of the German Foreign Office. At this meeting, the Vatican official is depicted as expressly acquiescing in the Nazi plans for the Final Solution. Supposing such a thing ever happened—and there is no evidence for it—it is hard to see why the personal moral guilt of Pius XII would not in fact be diminished if he were shown to be acting on the recommendations of a trusted official who was really, unbeknownst to the pope, working for the Germans.

The novel implies nothing of the kind: Pius XII remains the bad guy, and both the author and his characters from time to time give vent to their feelings about this supposedly flawed and failed pope. Some of these asides seem lifted almost verbatim from anti-Pius books such as Susan Zuccotti's tendentious *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust*, in which Pius XII is made to be somehow personally responsible for the 1,000-plus Jews who were rounded up in Rome in October, 1943 and deported to Auschwitz. What is not mentioned, either by Zuccotti or by Silva, is the truth recently brought out once again by the Jewish historian, Sir Martin Gilbert, namely, that around 4,000 of Rome's 5,000 Jews were hidden in Roman seminaries and convents—where the breaking of the rule of cloister in the latter institutions would have required papal approval—and were thereby saved from deportation.

The action of this thriller novel revolves around a fictitious new pope, Paul VII, who has just succeeded John Paul II, and who is a "liberal" pope who intends at long last to 'fess up and admit the Church's World War II guilt in failing to save

the Jews. A far-right secret society of traditionalist Catholics headed by an ice-cold cardinal character—the kind of person the anti-Pius people seem to imagine Pius himself was—is determined to stop this admission of Church guilt even if it means assassinating the new pope, Paul VII. As the “confessor” of the book’s title, this wicked and implacable cardinal sends out assassins with the promise of automatic absolution in the confessional for their deeds.

The nefarious Catholic traditionalists, however, fail to reckon with the Israeli superhero, Gabriel Allon. He is not only instrumental in saving the new pope from assassination, his exposé of the wartime sins of the Church through various acts of derring-do establish the need for the fictitious Paul VII to apologize for these wartime sins. In this regard, John Paul II’s actual “apologies,” at Rome’s synagogue in 1986 and again as recently as February, 2003, at the Wailing Wall several years back, and in his 1998 “We Remember” document, are evidently not enough; the only thing that will ever satisfy the anti-Pius people, apparently, is a total admission that Pope Pius XII was indeed guilty as charged.

It is dispiriting to realize that this author’s skill as a writer of popular thrillers will probably help persuade many readers about the “guilt” of Pius XII, thus expanding and perpetuating the defamation of the wartime pope to an even greater extent than is already the case. Unfortunately, among the sources acknowledged at the end of his book are such “anti-Catholic Catholics” as James Carroll, John Cornwell, and Garry Wills; but relying on such sources in trying to render anything like the proper “feel” of authentic Catholicism and how the Vatican functions is about as reliable as consulting the Jews for Jesus for insights into orthodox Jewish beliefs. These writers are arguably not even Catholic any longer, in spite of their pretence of being legitimate critics operating from “inside” the Catholic Church. With sources like these, Daniel Silva was never likely to get it right about the Church

and the pope, and The Confessor as a novel has to be added to the already large body of literature perpetuating the defamation of Pius XII.

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Bigotry's New Low: The New Republic's Taunt

by Michael Novak

(Catalyst 3/2002)

The government of the United States, George Washington wrote to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport in 1790, "gives to bigotry no sanction." But now The New Republic does.

"The anti-Semitism of the intellectuals," Peter Vierek once shrewdly remarked, "is anti-Catholicism." In its January 21 issue, *The New Republic* has sunk into the swamp of bigotry as low as it could go. It gave 25 pages to Daniel Jonah Goldhagen so that he could offer Catholics a theological interpretation of what their faith entails, and hint broadly that the Church deserves destruction as an ally of the anti-Christ and enemy of humankind.

In Goldhagen's fevered view, the startling uniqueness of Adolf Hitler's totalitarian racial hatred, a uniqueness that preoccupied a generation of philosophers of history, has been diminished until Hitler for him is only a later "chapter" in

the long history of Catholic perfidy and nefariousness toward the Jews.

The calm and objective assessment of wrong—with due regard for every circumstance—was not Goldhagen's aim, neither as moral judge nor as historian. His tirade is theological in form, making an argument about the theological nature of Catholicism, its doctrines, its criteria for martyrdom and for sainthood, its proper relation to Judaism, its conception of what its mission as Church is (its ecclesiology), its relation to truth and its ideal relation to other religions.

In its title (chosen perhaps by his editors, but well justified by his closing questions), Goldhagen opens with a theological taunt: "What would Jesus do?" There is no evidence in Goldhagen's work, nor in the recent history of *The New Republic*, that such a question is one he himself or the magazine for which he writes takes seriously. Nor is there any sign that he, or the magazine, has examined the life, work, and words of Jesus to see just what Jesus in fact did in the circumstances of his day closest to those of today. In other words, not a serious question but a taunt.

Regarding Roman imperialism, the subjection of the Jews, the Roman practices of slavery and torture (such as Jesus was made to suffer himself), according to the New Testament Jesus was, well, silent. "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were of this world, do you doubt that my Father would send legions of angels to my aid?"

His silence infuriated his accusers.

Unlike Jesus, Pius XII was not silent regarding the Jews. As secretary of state to Pius XI, he almost certainly had a determining hand in the letter condemning Hitler, *With Burning Concern* (*Mit Brennender Sorge*). Through the broadcasts of Vatican Radio, regularly amplified for the English-speaking world through *The Tablet* of London and the British

intelligence and broadcasting services, Pius XII was the first to tell the world about the sufferings of Jews (by name) and other minorities, including during the war years more millions of Catholics than Jews. Much that the New York Times and the London Times published about the plight of Jews, Poles, and other civilians during the early war years came from the Vatican, through its radio broadcasts, papal statements, and the Pope's newspaper (totally dependent on Mussolini for newsprint and less free than Vatican Radio) *Osservatore Romano*.

Although I have not read them myself, I am told by people I trust that the sworn depositions for the evidentiary process of beatification and canonization of Pius XII contain testimonies by persons well-known for their efforts to help the Jews, who affirm that they received specific instructions from the Pope to do so.

Even those scholars who minimize what the Pope did have had to admit that his personal efforts saved scores of thousands of Jews (in Hungary, Goldhagen admits)—too little, too late, they say. Was not what Schindler and Raul Wallenberg did also too little, too late, and yet altogether noble?

One may argue with Pius XII's principles, but one cannot argue that they marked out the course from which he did not waver: (1) neutrality as between the belligerent powers, in the case that papal mediation might one day be sought; (2) timely and clear enunciation of relevant moral principles (platitudes, as Goldhagen calls them; the timeless moral law); and (3) the denunciation of egregious abuses of moral principles, such as mass murders, the imprisonment of civilians solely for racial or religious or ethnic reasons, and mass bombings from airplanes of civilian populations in cities.

The Pope did not lack courage, and he did not lack clarity of mind. Mistaken he may have been. Open to criticism like any other mortal he certainly is. He prayed much and suffered much

internally under the pressure. But he did not waver. After the war, he received immense plaudits from the citizens of Italy, including the Jewish community of Rome, the nation of Israel, the Israeli Philharmonic that traveled to the Vatican in 1955 to give a concert in gratitude, and Jewish and other groups throughout the world. The rabbi of Rome became a Catholic, in large measure through being stirred by the assistance given Jews by the Pope and friendships formed in the process.

Though I am not a professional historian, I have read enough on Pius XII—and have a sizable personal library on the period—that I see the transparent tendentiousness of nearly every historical point that Goldhagen raises. In every case, he selects accounts or facts that set the Pope in the light he wishes to put popes into, and ignores facts, testimonies, and accounts that sharply contradict his version of events.

Yet let us suppose for a moment that every accusation Goldhagen makes against Pius XII is true. So then we had, as publisher Martin Peretz has it, a “wicked man” as pope. Well, it wouldn’t have been the first one. Indeed, Goldhagen says there is a danger in concentrating on Pius XII, because his personal behavior isn’t the issue. What is wrong with Christianity runs through all the popes. It infects the core of Christian theology itself. It corrupts the very essence of the Church. What Goldhagen calls for is nothing less than the extermination of the Church as it now is and has been since the beginning. *Ecrasez l’infame*.

The great sin of which Goldhagen accuses the Church is its “supersessionist creed,” namely, its clear teaching that the New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant. Even to speak of “New” and “Old,” Goldhagen quotes a soulmate, “is inherently supersessionist.”

As John Paul II has made clear, however, the Jewish Testament remains valid; God can no more become unfaithful to His covenant with the Jews than He can to His covenant with

Christians. The relation between Jews and Christians, therefore, is asymmetrical. Christians must understand and accept Jewish faith, in order to accept Christian faith. Their God is also the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Apart from the background, principles, and prophecies of the Jewish Testament, the Christian Testament does not make sense. Christians, in order to be Christians, must be Jews in belief (though not in circumcision and ritual), in a way that, in order to be Jews, Jews need not be Christians. That is the asymmetry.

To put this another way, in order to go deeper into their own faith as Christians, it is both common and altogether necessary for Christians to go deeper into the Jewish Testament and plumb all they can of Judaism, the Judaism of serious reflection today, as well as of yesteryear. For this reason, Christians today need a vital, believing Jewish community that will lead them into the depths of Jewish faith. The reverse can scarcely be said of Jews, many of whom feel no need whatever, in order to be Jews, to study Christian doctrine or history.

The reason Goldhagen is quite guilty of the charge of anti-Catholicism lies in the breadth and passion of the smears he spreads across a broad history, the distortion and hysteria of his tone, the extremity of his rage, and the lack of proportion in his judgments—dwarfing Hitler and making Pius XII a giant of evil, and then diminishing Pius XII so as to indict the whole of Christian theology down the ages. It is disingenuous of him to stop at Christ, the good and gentle Christ of his parody, and at the edges of the Christian Testament, which is our main source for knowledge about the character and teachings of Christ.

Goldhagen went over the top in disqualifying Catholics from any moral standing, so long as they hold to Catholic faith as it is. He wants a new type of Catholicism to supersede the old. In this, he reminds me not a little of Voltaire and other

haters of the Church. The Enlightenment, too, was supersessionist in its self-conception, its light triumphing over the darkness of Rome—and not just of Rome, but of Jerusalem as well.

We have all had to learn that we must accept one another's reality as we are, without trying to make others over into our own image of what they ought to be. We can appeal to one another in argument and in debate, in mutual searching, and even in mutual fraternal correction of one another's oversights and errors. But mutual honor and respect are the first preconditions of dialogue. It is sad that The New Republic went over to the side of a bigotry that makes dialogue impossible. After many centuries of woe, we need every moment of dialogue that we can get.

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A “Moral” Crusade Against Catholicism

by Bronwen McShea

(review of Daniel Goldhagen's A Moral Reckoning, Catalyst 1/2003)

Daniel J. Goldhagen's latest book, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair*, purports to be a much-needed “moral

philosophical" contribution to a troubled field of scholarship. Standing on the shoulders of other critics of Pope Pius XII's wartime Church—James Carroll, Garry Wills, David Kertzer, to name a few—Goldhagen calls upon all Catholics to own up to the deep-seated antisemitism in their Church's past which he calls "a necessary cause" of the Holocaust.

As Goldhagen's "inquiry" proceeds, it becomes increasingly clear that his program for "moral reckoning" has less to do with the historical record of Catholic involvement in the Holocaust, criminal or otherwise, than it does with the author's opinion of Catholicism itself—that it is inherently flawed, and must be reformed out of all recognition.

At first Goldhagen focuses his attention on the hypocrisy of a Church whose wartime leaders preached "love and goodness" but failed in many instances to exhibit Christ-like heroism in defense of innocent Jews. In his excitement over what he considers an insightful use of the Catholic "sins of omission" concept, Goldhagen allows its definition to balloon to the point where he faults the Church for failing "to tend to the souls of the mass murderers and of the other persecutors of Jews." One wonders what Goldhagen pictured in his mind when writing such a line: a toddling Hitler and Goebbels in kindergarten, given less tender, loving care by their nuns and priests than they deserved? Does Goldhagen honestly believe the Church was in a position to reach and reform all those who chose the demonic descent into Nazism?

The integrity of Goldhagen's arguments seem less a priority than taking swipes at the Church wherever he can. How else can we explain his frequent demands that the Church be held to the highest of standards—to live Christian love and goodness to perfection—and his simultaneous suggestions that the very faith which is the lifeblood of such love and goodness should be rejected? For indeed, while he asks the question, "What would Jesus have done," his contention that he is only

concerned for Catholics to strive more fully in their faith quickly breaks down as soon as his program for a Catholic "moral reckoning" takes shape. Catholics, he proposes, to do right by the Jews, must effectively cease to be Catholics—must abandon their Scriptures, their Pope, and even the Cross itself.

"The Catholic Church has a Bible problem," writes Goldhagen matter-of-factly in the latter part of the book. "The antisemitism of the Bible is not incidental to it but constitutive of its story of Jesus' life and death and of its messages about God and humanity." Adding that "the structure of the Gospels in particular is antisemitic," Goldhagen proposes that the Pope and all those who teach the Catholic faith must teach as "falsehoods" some 80 "antisemitic" passages in Matthew, 40 in Mark, 60 in Luke, 130 in John, 140 in Acts, and so on. He then begs the question whether it would not also be just to demand that the Church expunge these several hundred passages from the Christian Scriptures. Goldhagen defines as "antisemitic" any passage in the Bible which in any way implicates Jews in the death of Christ, or which in any way suggests that Christianity has superceded Judaism as the faith of God's people. Apparently, we are supposed to reject as "null and void" the Gospels accounts of Judas's betrayal of his Lord, Christ's mockery of a trial before the Sanhedrin and His being handed over to the Roman authorities, and the crowds of men and women who cheered for Christ's death sentence. Also, Goldhagen explicitly says that the phrase "New Testament" is itself offensive to Jews, as it implies the Old has been superceded or fulfilled by Christ's divine mission. His suggestion to Rome for righting this offense? It must declare and teach every last Catholic that Christianity has in no way superceded Judaism, and it must "renounce the Church's position that the Catholic Church is universal."

For it was fervent belief in the universality of the Church,

Goldhagen argues, which animated Christian persecutions of Jews in the past, and made Europe's soil fertile for the Holocaust. Likewise, it was the Catholic identification of their Pope as the divinely-appointed leader of all Christians which encouraged them in "imperial aspirations" that were deadly for many Jews. Goldhagen's recipe for "moral reckoning" in this area is for Catholics, first, to renounce the doctrine of papal infallibility, and to acknowledge that its "authoritarian structure and culture, undergirded by the infallibility doctrine, is inherently dishonest." Second, the Church must "cease to be a political institution" and abdicate its rule over the Vatican city state. Additionally, the Church must stop its missions around the world, as missions are, in Goldhagen's opinion, inherently "political" ventures designed to forward the Pope's ultimate aim of acquiring "suzerainty" over all mankind. Lastly, this depoliticized Catholic Church must at every opportunity support and advocate for the interests of the state of Israel—this, Goldhagen believes, is the proper way of repaying a modicum of the debt Catholics owe the Jewish people.

It is perhaps when discussing the "political" nature of the Catholic Church where Goldhagen strays into his most offensive diatribes. "Seen from the outside, and certainly from the vantage point of a political scientist," he writes, "Catholic doctrine, theology, and liturgy looks, historically and even today, more like the ideology of an imperial power, sometimes an antagonistic power, than a mere set of beliefs about God." And an "antagonistic power," of course, must be fended off by a society concerned for its well-being generally and the well-being of its Jews specifically. It is quite remarkable that Goldhagen feels so free to attack Catholic "doctrine, theology, and liturgy" in a book that is ostensibly about the Church's comportment during the Nazi era. It is in such diatribes where Goldhagen shows his hand as a bigot whose concern is to actively undermine a faith he detests, rather than simply to seek justice for Jews in a manner appropriate

to one who professes allegiance to the ideals of a pluralistic society.

At the heart of Catholic theology is the Crucifixion—the redemptive death of the God-man Christ, who was born of a Jewish virgin. The Crucifixion symbolizes many things for Catholics (not least the supernatural, self-sacrificing love and goodness Goldhagen reminds Catholics to imitate), but among them is the tragedy foretold in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be rejected by many of his own nation—the necessary, painful tragedy of the New Israel’s birth amidst the Old. Goldhagen, as a Jew, has every right as a free man to reject all such teachings about the Crucifixion, and every right to state his own belief in their error in a scholarly text on the subject. Yet he goes farther than this: he makes the inflammatory suggestion that the Cross, historically seen as “an antisemitic symbol and weapon,” is “all too likely to provoke further antipathy toward Jews.” Elsewhere in the book Goldhagen describes any such provocation as veritably criminal in light of the horrors endured by the Jewish people in the last century, and that the Church must take every step possible to avoid even “planting the seed” of antisemitism in any human heart.

We are left to conclude— though Goldhagen is not bold enough to state it outright—that Goldhagen sees it as a duty, or at least a welcome idea, for Catholic leaders to remove the Cross from their churches—inside as well as out. If he can call for the expurgation of Catholic Holy Writ, surely he is capable of calling for the removal of all Catholic sacred symbols from any wall, any steeple, if those symbols give any kind of encouragement to antisemitism.

Goldhagen, for all his moral outrage at one of the most criminal treatments of any religious group or people known to history, openly encourages the suppression of Catholic teachings, Catholic symbols, and even Catholic autonomy from the world’s political powers as it is entailed by the

existence of the Vatican city state. How such a posture can benefit the cause of greater tolerance of, and accommodation for, any religious community is a great mystery which Goldhagen does not even attempt to answer in his fustian "moral philosophical inquiry."

After reading *A Moral Reckoning*, it is very easy to see why Rabbi David Rosen, international director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, a year ago criticized Goldhagen for his "unconcealed antagonism against the Catholic Church." Rosen is among many Jews who are embarrassed and angered by Goldhagen's imprudent, vicious posture against Catholics. Goldhagen is upsetting and retarding the already stormy (though recently fruitful) efforts by Jews and Catholics to arrive at better understanding of each other's communities. Jews and Catholics alike rightly regard Goldhagen's brand of "scholarship" as poison to productive dialogue and genuine moral philosophical inquiry.

The lukewarm to negative reviews the book has elicited from the critics have been its one saving grace. Even *New York Times* critic Geoffrey Wheatcroft threw up his hands at the close of his review and asked how Goldhagen "can in good faith plead with the church to abandon the very doctrines that define it." Nevertheless, such critiques have not prevented the editors of the *Times* and other newspapers from naming *A Moral Reckoning* one of the "best books" of 2002. That the organs of the popular press react with such knee-jerk favorability to any book—no matter its merits—which attacks the Catholic Church is perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from Goldhagen's efforts. In a way, Goldhagen ought to be thanked for reminding us yet again that unabashed anti-Catholicism is alive and well both in the press and in the academy.

Bronwen Catherine McShea was a policy analyst for the Catholic League. She is now enrolled in a Master of Theological Studies

program at Harvard Divinity School.

Of Stereotypes and Heroes

by Richard C. Lukas

(Catalyst 7/2002)

Nowhere is the politicization of history and its practitioners more evident than in the recent writings of a number of historians of the Holocaust era. The temptations of glitz, glamour and money seem to have influenced some historians to sensationalize their subjects to get noticed by the media.

Instead of writing history as it really is—filled with complexity and nuance—these historians offer us morality plays. They consist of monocausal interpretations of complicated subjects with the lines of good and evil sharply etched. Too often they allow their biases, prejudices and personal histories to blemish the integrity of their craft.

Today it is intellectually acceptable to target certain individuals and groups for the death of five to six million Jews. Pope Pius XII, once widely praised by Jewish leaders and communities, has now become the most conspicuous target of a number of pope bashers, who have created a quasi-historical genre of their own. The writings of John Cornwell and David Kertzer are distinguished by their obsession to depict the Papacy in the worst possible light. In his highly publicized tome, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Daniel Goldhagen wants us to believe that ever since the nineteenth century, the German nation wanted to eliminate the Jews. According to this bizarre interpretation, Hitler was almost an incidental chapter in the history of the Holocaust. Is it now historically acceptable to

place collective responsibility on the entire German people that was once employed by anti-Semites against the Jews? It is the same Goldhagen who was allowed by the editors of the New Republic to write an article that suggests there is a moral equivalence between the Roman Catholic Church and the Nazi party. Theologian Michael Novak perceptively observed:

“The reason Goldhagen is quite guilty of the charge of anti-Catholicism lies in the breadth and passion of the smears he spreads across a broad history, the distortion and hysteria of his tone, the extremity of his rage and the lack of proportion in his judgments.”

No people have been more viciously stereotyped than the Poles. Forgetting that the Poles were Hitler's first victims and that the Nazi-established killing laboratory in Poland would later be used against the Jews and other groups, writers have sought to stereotype the Poles as a nation of willing collaborators with the Nazis in the genocide of the Jews. Despite the fact that Poland ranks first among the nations of the world which rendered help to the Jews during the Holocaust, the Polish role in aiding Jews has been largely ignored or denigrated.

A highly-touted book, *Neighbors*, by Jan T. Gross, claims that Polish Catholics in the village of Jedwabne in northeastern Poland were entirely responsible for killing their Jewish neighbors while the Germans allegedly remained passive bystanders. Even though relations between the two groups had been good before the war, Gross presents a tableau of hundreds of Catholic Poles mindlessly slaughtering Jews because now, quite suddenly, they despised them and lusted after their property.

Gross, who is a Jewish sociologist, never proves his claim. He prefers to rely on questionable evidence and fails to investigate German archives to substantiate his grave allegation. Despite the fact that *Neighbors* raised more questions than it answered, it is testimony to the enduring

power of the stereotype that the National Book Foundation nominated the book for an award.

There is strong evidence, which Gross denies, that the Germans, not the Poles, were the organizers and major executors of the massacre. Only a few Poles, a small criminal element, were involved in the crime. In an interview published in *Inside the Vatican*, Dr. Tomasz Strzembosz, Poland's leading authority on the history of eastern Poland, described Gross's book as "a journalistic work, written without [a] serious scientific basis."

It isn't too surprising that books that sensationalize and distort serious and controversial subjects receive uncritical acceptance by members of the popular media who themselves have internalized the stereotypes of particular individuals and groups. Even respected university publishers have been complicit in printing volumes which do not meet the rigors of historical scholarship and are more akin to propaganda than history.

What we have is the worst kind of revisionism, which treats history like a loose-leaf notebook. Historians remove the pages which disagree with their opinions and substitute those which support their views. Much of the historiography of the Holocaust era reveals a kind of Gresham's law where bad history drives out good history, making it difficult for even professional historians to determine where sensationalism, propaganda and martyrology ends and history begins. History becomes a major casualty and the integrity of the historical profession is seriously compromised.

There are criminals in every society, including our own. No people have a monopoly on good; no people have a monopoly on evil. Do we further the interests of history by defining a nation by its worst elements? Historians have succeeded in unearthing the evils of the Holocaust era. But they have been far less conscientious and resourceful in revealing to us the

thousands of heroes and heroines in all countries of German-occupied Europe who took enormous risks in helping others during the Nazi era.

Many years ago, Rabbi Harold Schulweis remarked that we need heroes and heroines, these exemplars of good, to teach us and our children about goodness. We need them as a counterweight to the evil of Nazism and what it perpetrated upon Jews and gentiles. Historian Istvan Deak echoed the same sentiments in the pages of the New York Review of Books, "We ought to celebrate, more than ever, such heroes, whether Polish saviors of Jews, Jewish ghetto fighters, Bulgarian bishops and politicians, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Polish guerillas, who stood up for their beliefs and died fighting the worst tyrannies in modern history." Historians need to ask themselves today why are the names of Bormann, Himmler, Heydrich, Goebbels and other Nazis universally known and reviled while most of the names of the Christian saviors of Jews have been forgotten?

Among the hundreds of thousands of men and women who should be celebrated for their courage and goodness is Irena Sendler, an extraordinary Polish Catholic woman, who did not have the benefit of the diplomatic position of a Raoul Wallenberg or the financial resources of an Oskar Schindler.

After the Germans forced the Jews of the Polish capital into the Warsaw Ghetto, Sendler brought food, money and medicine to the Jewish people. Wearing an armband with the Star of David to show her solidarity with Warsaw's Jews, she obtained documents from the city's social welfare department to enable her to move freely within the ghetto without interference from the Germans and Jewish police. Approximately 3,000 Jews received help from Sendler.

Even more remarkable and dangerous was Sendler's work for Żegota, a unique clandestine organization, organized in December, 1942, which assisted thousands of Jews who fled the

Ghetto to avoid being transported to the German death camps. Risking automatic execution if they were caught by the Germans, Żegota operatives found shelter, provided food and medical assistance and gave forged documents to Jews under their care.

The primary focus of Żegota's work was to save as many Jewish children as possible. Żegota officials recognized that Irena Sendler was the best qualified person for the daunting task. This fearless woman was largely responsible for saving the lives of 2,600 Jewish children.

Sendler, who had several close calls in her ceaseless efforts to avoid the Gestapo, was finally arrested in October, 1943. Confined to the infamous Pawiak Prison where she was brutally tortured, Sendler expected to be shot by the Germans. But thanks to a well-placed bribe by a Żegota official to a Gestapo officer, Sendler's life was spared. After her release from prison, Sendler lived like the Jewish children she has rescued—in hiding. Still wearing the scars of her beatings by the Germans, the elderly Sendler lives today in obscurity in Warsaw. She deserves her historian and her Spielberg to tell the world her compelling story of sacrifice, courage and goodness.

In time the extremist, sensationalist accounts of Pope Pius XII, the Catholic Church and the Poles during World War II will be winnowed out and more credible interpretations will remain to explain their respective places in modern history. Perhaps a younger generation of historians will discover the rich resources, as yet largely untapped, of the good people who stood up for their beliefs against totalitarianism and celebrate their remarkable lives.

We will finally get what we should have had all along—history that is custom fit in an off-the-rack world.

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 seven books.

His book, The Forgotten Holocaust, went through several editions, including a Polish one, and is now considered a classic. His Did the Children Cry? won the Janusz Korczak Literary Award, sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League and the Kosciuszko Foundation.

Both volumes, published by Hippocrene, are available in paperback.

Fr. Pierre Blet, S.J.: Pius XII and the Second World War: According to the Archives of the Vatican

by Sr. Margherita Marchione, M.P.F.

(Catalyst 1/2002)

An extraordinary new book, a scholarly compendium of vital historical documents, *Pius XII and the Second World War: According to the Archives of the Vatican* (Paulist Press, 1999) by Father Pierre Blet, S.J., greatly expands our knowledge of what Pope Pius XII did to help victims of Nazi oppression in Europe during World War II. The author of this essential work is one of a team of four Jesuit historians who edited the Vatican documents published from 1965-1981 in 12 volumes.

Blet's book is a summary, not only of the Vatican's assistance to all Nazi victims but it also counters many of the

accusations launched against Pius XII, as it carefully establishes the historical record of his compassion and heroism, and documents his opposition to all totalitarian movements, especially Nazism.

Addressing the prelates of the Roman Curia (December 24, 1939), Pius XII stated that in order to establish world peace with order and justice, it was necessary (1) to assure each nation, whether large or small, its right to life and independence; (2) to free nations from the burden of an arms race through a mutually agreed upon, organic, and progressive disarmament; (3) to rebuild and create international institutions while bearing in mind the weaknesses of previous ones; (4) to recognize, especially in the interests of European order, the rights of ethnic minorities; (5) to recognize above all human laws and conventions "the holy and immovable divine law."

In his letters to the bishops, Pius XII spoke out in favor of a peace "with justice for all and for each of the belligerents, [a peace] that need not be ashamed when measured by Christian principles and, for this reason, a peace carrying in itself the guarantee of security and of time" (Letter to Cardinal Faulhaber, January 18, 1940).

Pope Pius XII's was aware that his messages were not reaching the German episcopate. In a message to the German bishops, dated August 6, 1940, he allows us to understand his position: "After seeing and experiencing during the years of Our work in Germany how harshly the German people had to suffer the continuing and humiliating effects of their defeat, and after Ourselves witnessing the way in which the previous peace treaty's lack of proper balance has brought forth as a fatal consequence the contrasts whose elimination by violent means has the earth tremble today, We can only express our ardent hope that when the war ends, at a time known only by Providence, the eyes of the victorious will be opened to the voice of justice, equity, wisdom, and moderation, without

which no peace treaty, no matter how solemn its ratification may be, can last and can have the happy consequences desired by all people.”

When Germany began its war with Russia, Pius XII did not change his position. His work on behalf of peace increased in intensity. He worked “for a merciful peace which protects against violence and injustice, which brings together and reconciles, which establishes for all former belligerents without exception supportable relations and the possibility of a prosperous development” (February 24, 1942). On March 1, 1942, he wrote: “Whereas Our Christmas radio message found a strong echo in the world, indeed beyond the circle of Christianity, We learn with sadness that it was almost completely hidden from the German Catholics.”

Pius XII reminded Germany and Soviet Russia of their responsibilities: “Your conscience and your sense of honor should lead you to treat the people of occupied territories with a spirit of justice, of humanity, and with broadness of outlook. Do not impose any burden upon them that you have judged or would judge to be unjust if you were in a situation like theirs Above all, keep in mind that God’s blessing or curse upon your own country may depend on your conduct toward those who, because of the fortunes of war, have fallen under your power.”

Pius XII did not want to provoke reprisals against the Church in Germany. In keeping with Vatican protocol, he delegated the task of speaking out to the bishops. He explained to Cardinal Preysing (April 30, 1943): “We give to the pastors who are working on the local level the duty of determining if and to what degree the danger of reprisals and of various forms of oppression occasioned by episcopal declarations—as well as perhaps other circumstances caused by the length and mentality of the war—seem to advise caution to avoid greater evil despite alleged reasons urging the contrary.”

Writing to the archbishop of Cologne (March 3, 1944), Pius XII spoke about "the superhuman effort necessary to keep the Holy See above the quarrels of the parties, and the confusion, almost impossible to unravel, between political and ideological currents, between violence and law (incomparably more so in the present conflict than in the last war) to the extent that it is extremely difficult to decide what must be done: reserve and prudent silence, or resolutely speaking out and vigorous action."

The Vatican's Holy Office had issued a formal decree on March 25, 1928, condemning anti-Semitism: "Moved by Christian charity, the Holy See is obligated to protect the Jewish people against unjust vexations and, just as it reprobates all rancour and conflicts between peoples, it particularly condemns unreservedly hatred against the people once chosen by God; the hatred that commonly goes by the name of anti-Semitism."

Blet's book reveals that Pius XII applied this teaching and spoke out repeatedly against the outrages of Nazism by exhorting his representatives to oppose the racial laws and to intervene on behalf of persecuted Jews.

The Pontiff was aware that speaking out explicitly against Hitler's purges would have aggravated the Führer's anger and accelerated the Nazi efforts to exterminate the Jews, a concern borne out by the Nazi retaliation that included the martyrdom of Edith Stein shortly after the Dutch Bishops denounced Hitler.

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 his *War Memories* de Gaulle reports on his impressions during a meeting the following month: “Pius XII judges everything from a perspective that surpasses human beings, their undertakings and their quarrels. ... His lucid thought focuses on the consequences: the outbreak of ideologies identified with Communism and Nationalism in a large part of the world. His inspiration reveals to him that only Christian faith, hope, and charity, even if they be submerged for a long time and everywhere, can overcome these ideologies. For him everything depends on the policy of the Church, on what it does, on its language, on the way it conducts itself. This is why the Pastor has made the church a domain reserved to himself personally and where he displays the gifts of authority, of influence, of the eloquence given him by God. Pious, compassionate, political—in the highest meaning these can assume—such does this pontiff and sovereign appear to me because of the respect that he inspires in me.”

Father Blet, former professor of Ecclesiastical History at the Gregorian University in Rome, stated that “the monumental work of 12 volumes of documentation include all the official documents in which the Jewish communities, the Rabbis of the world, and other refugees, thank Pope Pius XII and the Catholic Church for all the help and work in their favor. ... The Pope was conscious of what he had accomplished to prevent the war, to alleviate its sufferings, to reduce the number of its victims, everything he thought he could do. The documents, insofar as they allow one to probe the human heart, come to the same conclusion.”

Sister Margherita Marchione is the author of *Yours Is a Precious Witness: Memoirs of Jews and Catholics in Wartime Italy* and *Pius XII: Architect for Peace*.

David Kertzer: The Popes Against the Jews

by Ronald Rychlak

(Catalyst 12/2001)

A couple of years ago, when critics charged that Pope Pius XII had shown a callous indifference to the plight of the Jews, the common refrain was that if only he had been more outspoken on behalf of the Jews, like his predecessors, thousands of more lives might have been saved. The traditional view of Popes is that they defended the life and safety of Jews, even when some Catholics were not as Christian as they should have been.

Now, along comes a book by David Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews*, in which he argues that far from being defenders of Jewish people, Popes of the 19th and early 20th centuries, up until (and implicitly including) Pius XII were actually anti-Semites who paved the way for the Holocaust. Nowhere in his book is he able to document any modern Pope making any explicit statement in support of anti-Semitism, but he attempts to re-write history by focusing on a handful of issues taken out of context and without a full exploration of the evidence. The result, as Rabbi David Dalin recently wrote in *The Weekly Standard*: “is both false and unpersuasive.”

Kertzer says he was motivated to write his book after reading the 1998 Vatican document, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*. That statement explained the difference between anti-Judaism, of which the Vatican admitted “Christians have also been guilty,” and the racial anti-Semitism embraced by the

Nazis. This latter evil contradicts core Catholic beliefs, and the Church has always condemned it.

The difference is illustrated in Kertzer's discussion of Pope Pius IX and Edgardo Mortara (which took place when slavery was still legal in the United States). This Jewish boy was baptized by a Catholic servant, removed from his family, and brought up by the Pope. Church rules prevented the Christian child from returning to his family (though they were allowed to visit and could have converted to have him returned). It seems very harsh today, but it was not racial anti-Semitism. There was no hatred here. Edgardo and Pius developed a father-son relationship, and the boy grew up to become a priest. Kertzer seems not to understand that such a result would have been unthinkable for an anti-Semite.

Discussing Pope Benedict XV, Kertzer overlooks the most significant, direct piece of evidence. In 1916, American Jews petitioned Benedict on behalf of Polish Jews. The response was as follows:

"The Supreme Pontiff... as Head of the Catholic Church, which, faithful to its divine doctrines and its most glorious traditions, considers all men as brothers and teaches them to love one another, he never ceases to indicate among individuals, as well as among peoples, the observance of the principles of the natural law, and to condemn everything that violates them. This law must be observed and respected in the case of the children of Israel, as well as of all others, because it would not be conformable to justice or to religion itself to derogate from it solely on account of divergence of religious confessions."

Kertzer fails to mention this express papal condemnation of anti-Semitism, which was published in the Jesuit Journal *Civiltà Cattolica* – though he does seem to quote every anti-Jewish comment published by that journal.

Benedict was succeeded by Pope Pius XI who was decidedly supportive of Jews. In 1928, the Vatican under his leadership issued a statement that was cited by rescuers during the Holocaust. It said that the Church "just as it reproves all rancours in conflicts between peoples, to the maximum extent condemns hatred of the people once chosen by God, the hatred that commonly goes by the name of anti-Semitism." In November 1931, the chief rabbi of Milan thanked the Pope for his appeals against anti-Semitism and his continuing support for Italy's Jews.

In 1937, Pius issued the papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*. This encyclical still stands as one of the strongest condemnations of any national regime that the Holy See has ever published. Kertzer reports that *Mit brennender Sorge* contains no explicit reference to anti-Semitism. His citation for this: the much discredited Hitler's Pope by John Cornwell. It causes one to seriously question Kertzer's qualifications as an historian.

Mit brennender Sorge strongly condemned the neo-paganism of Nazi theories. It stated in part that:

"Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental value of the human community... whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God."

Pius went on with further condemnations of racial theories:

"None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion; or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations..."

No one who read this document at the time had any illusion

about the gravity of these statements or their significance.

On September 6, 1938, in a statement which – though barred from the Fascist press – made its way around the world, Pius XI said:

“Mark well that in the Catholic Mass, Abraham is our Patriarch and forefather. Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the lofty thought which that fact expresses. It is a movement with which we Christians can have nothing to do. No, no, I say to you it is impossible for a Christian to take part in anti-Semitism. It is inadmissible. Through Christ and in Christ we are the spiritual progeny of Abraham. Spiritually, we are all Semites.”

This statement was made while the most powerful nation in Europe had an officially anti-Semitic government and was poised only a few hundred miles to the north of Rome. Everyone understood their significance, especially the victims. In January 1939, *The National Jewish Monthly* reported that “the only bright spot in Italy has been the Vatican, where fine humanitarian statements by the Pope have been issuing regularly.”

So how does Kertzer try to convert Pope Pius XI, a celebrated champion of the Jews, into an anti-Semite? In imitation of John Cornwell (a quote from whom appears on Kertzer’s cover) he has found a previously published letter, noted some uncomfortable language within it, and attempted to use it to smear the reputation of a good and holy man.

Monsignor Achille Ratti, the future Pius XI, served as papal nuncio to Poland after World War I. In one of his reports back to Rome he stated: “One of the most evil and strongest influences that is felt here, perhaps the strongest and the most evil, is that of the Jews.” To Kertzer, this brands him evermore as an anti-Semite.

In point of fact, Ratti had been sent to a largely Catholic

nation with instructions to report back to Rome on any significant developments. It so happens at that time there was a significant threat of a Communist revolution. Many of the leaders of this movement were Jewish. Ratti was reporting on what he saw, but he was no anti-Semite.

Even in the early years, Ratti was known to be on good terms with the Jews. As a young priest in Milan he learned Hebrew from a local rabbi. He enjoyed warm relations with Italian Jewish leaders in the early years of his priesthood. During his tenure in Poland, amid Europe's largest Jewish population, he saw anti-Semitic persecution. This led the future pope to denounce anti-Semitism and make it clear "that any anti-Semitic outbursts would be severely condemned by the Holy See."

Instructed by Pope Benedict to direct the distribution of Catholic relief in postwar Poland, Ratti provided funds to impoverished Jews who had lost their homes and businesses. Whereas Kertzer asserts that Ratti only met once with Poland's Jews, and studiously tried to avoid them, better scholars have documented that he greeted and assisted Jews all throughout his three-year stay in Poland.

Kertzer's other attempts to smear the papacy are similarly lacking in balance. He devotes three chapters to the ancient charge that during the Passover, Jews ritually murdered Christian children, to get their blood. This "blood libel" was not an invention of the Popes, nor for that matter of Catholics, but Kertzer implies that being duped by a fabrication is as bad as inventing it, and he makes very little mention of the numerous papal condemnations of the blood libel charge. Moreover, Kertzer charges Fr. August Rohling with being one of the primary causes of anti-Semitic agitation in the Austrian empire during the 1880s, but he gives no mention of the Vatican's rebuke of Rohling for furthering the blood libel.

Kertzer charges that there was a Vatican "campaign" to popularize the infamous, anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. His evidence for this is that a French priest tried to do that in the 1920s. Of course Kertzer ignores that another French priest, Fr. Pierre Charles, SJ, wrote an article in the 1930s thoroughly debunking the forgery and that Fr. Leslie Walker, S.J. devoted much of his work to exposing the *Protocols* as a historical fraud. In fact, according to the *Boston Pilot*, September 1942, "again and again the charge that there exists an organized Jewish conspiracy against Christian civilization has been proved by Catholic scholars to be an impious forgery."

Discussing the treason trial of Alfred Dreyfus, Kertzer's emphasizes the French Catholics who contributed to the persecution of an innocent man, but he fails to mention the Papacy's opposition to this anti-Semitic campaign. In a book about *Papal anti-Semitism*, this is a rather serious oversight. What we do get about Pope Leo XIII is buried in a footnote: two years before this case developed, Leo came out strongly defending Jews and opposed to anti-Semitism.

The truth is that the papacy stands out as the one of the few protectors of Jews during the period Kertzer examines. Selective evidence and crabbed interpretations cannot change that fact. Those who want to know more about this history are advised to consult a booklet published by the American Bishops entitled: *Catholics Remember the Holocaust*, which contains the full text of the Vatican's 1998 Shoah document, statements from various episcopal conferences, and Cardinal Cassidy's clarification and response to those (like Kertzer) who misread and misinterpret this important document.

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Benedict was succeeded by Pope Pius XI who was decidedly supportive of Jews. In 1928, the Vatican under his leadership issued a statement that was cited by rescuers during the

Holocaust. It said that the Church “just as it reproves all rancours in conflicts between peoples, to the maximum extent condemns hatred of the people once chosen by God, the hatred that commonly goes by the name of anti-Semitism.” In November 1931, the chief rabbi of Milan thanked the Pope for his appeals against anti-Semitism and his continuing support for Italy’s Jews.

In 1937, Pius issued the papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*. This encyclical still stands as one of the strongest condemnations of any national regime that the Holy See has ever published. Kertzer reports that *Mit brennender Sorge* contains no explicit reference to anti-Semitism. His citation for this: the much discredited Hitler’s Pope by John Cornwell. It causes one to seriously question Kertzer’s qualifications as an historian.

Mit brennender Sorge strongly condemned the neo-paganism of Nazi theories. It stated in part that:

“Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental value of the human community... whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God.”

Pius went on with further condemnations of racial theories:

“None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion; or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations...”

No one who read this document at the time had any illusion about the gravity of these statements or their significance.

On September 6, 1938, in a statement which – though barred

from the Fascist press – made its way around the world, Pius XI said:

“Mark well that in the Catholic Mass, Abraham is our Patriarch and forefather. Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the lofty thought which that fact expresses. It is a movement with which we Christians can have nothing to do. No, no, I say to you it is impossible for a Christian to take part in anti-Semitism. It is inadmissible. Through Christ and in Christ we are the spiritual progeny of Abraham. Spiritually, we are all Semites.”

This statement was made while the most powerful nation in Europe had an officially anti-Semitic government and was poised only a few hundred miles to the north of Rome. Everyone understood their significance, especially the victims. In January 1939, *The National Jewish Monthly* reported that “the only bright spot in Italy has been the Vatican, where fine humanitarian statements by the Pope have been issuing regularly.”

So how does Kertzer try to convert Pope Pius XI, a celebrated champion of the Jews, into an anti-Semite? In imitation of John Cornwell (a quote from whom appears on Kertzer’s cover) he has found a previously published letter, noted some uncomfortable language within it, and attempted to use it to smear the reputation of a good and holy man.

Monsignor Achille Ratti, the future Pius XI, served as papal nuncio to Poland after World War I. In one of his reports back to Rome he stated: “One of the most evil and strongest influences that is felt here, perhaps the strongest and the most evil, is that of the Jews.” To Kertzer, this brands him evermore as an anti-Semite.

In point of fact, Ratti had been sent to a largely Catholic nation with instructions to report back to Rome on any significant developments. It so happens at that time there was

a significant threat of a Communist revolution. Many of the leaders of this movement were Jewish. Ratti was reporting on what he saw, but he was no anti-Semite.

Even in the early years, Ratti was known to be on good terms with the Jews. As a young priest in Milan he learned Hebrew from a local rabbi. He enjoyed warm relations with Italian Jewish leaders in the early years of his priesthood. During his tenure in Poland, amid Europe's largest Jewish population, he saw anti-Semitic persecution. This led the future pope to denounce anti-Semitism and make it clear "that any anti-Semitic outbursts would be severely condemned by the Holy See."

Instructed by Pope Benedict to direct the distribution of Catholic relief in postwar Poland, Ratti provided funds to impoverished Jews who had lost their homes and businesses. Whereas Kertzer asserts that Ratti only met once with Poland's Jews, and studiously tried to avoid them, better scholars have documented that he greeted and assisted Jews all throughout his three-year stay in Poland.

Kertzer's other attempts to smear the papacy are similarly lacking in balance. He devotes three chapters to the ancient charge that during the Passover, Jews ritually murdered Christian children, to get their blood. This "blood libel" was not an invention of the Popes, nor for that matter of Catholics, but Kertzer implies that being duped by a fabrication is as bad as inventing it, and he makes very little mention of the numerous papal condemnations of the blood libel charge. Moreover, Kertzer charges Fr. August Rohling with being one of the primary causes of anti-Semitic agitation in the Austrian empire during the 1880s, but he gives no mention of the Vatican's rebuke of Rohling for furthering the blood libel.

Kertzer charges that there was a Vatican "campaign" to popularize the infamous, anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders*

of Zion. His evidence for this is that a French priest tried to do that in the 1920s. Of course Kertzer ignores that another French priest, Fr. Pierre Charles, SJ, wrote an article in the 1930s thoroughly debunking the forgery and that Fr. Leslie Walker, S.J. devoted much of his work to exposing the *Protocols* as a historical fraud. In fact, according to the *Boston Pilot*, September 1942, "again and again the charge that there exists an organized Jewish conspiracy against Christian civilization has been proved by Catholic scholars to be an impious forgery."

Discussing the treason trial of Alfred Dreyfus, Kertzer's emphasizes the French Catholics who contributed to the persecution of an innocent man, but he fails to mention the Papacy's opposition to this anti-Semitic campaign. In a book about *Papal* anti-Semitism, this is a rather serious oversight. What we do get about Pope Leo XIII is buried in a footnote: two years before this case developed, Leo came out strongly defending Jews and opposed to anti-Semitism.

The truth is that the papacy stands out as the one of the few protectors of Jews during the period Kertzer examines. Selective evidence and crabbed interpretations cannot change that fact. Those who want to know more about this history are advised to consult a booklet published by the American Bishops entitled: *Catholics Remember the Holocaust*, which contains the full text of the Vatican's 1998 Shoah document, statements from various episcopal conferences, and Cardinal Cassidy's clarification and response to those (like Kertzer) who misread and misinterpret this important document.

Pope Pius XII Study Group: A Wasted Opportunity

by Ronald Rychlak

(Catalyst 9/2001)

The self-destruction of the Catholic-Jewish Pope Pius XII study group came as little surprise to those who had been following its progress closely. From the very beginning, several members of that group rejected their mandate and instead sought to force a change in Vatican archival policy. When the Vatican stood its ground and demanded that the team finish its agreed assignment, the scholars suspended their work. The charges and accusations that followed have damaged the work of Pope John Paul II to bring Catholics and Jews closer together. The shame is that this all could have been avoided.

The situation began in 1999, when Cardinal Edward Cassidy – then President of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews – and Mr. Seymour D. Reich, Chairman of International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations announced the appointment of a team of six scholars charged with examining the 11 volumes of archival material published by the Holy See’s Secretariat of State (*Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre*, or “ADSS.”)

The ADSS contains the diplomatic correspondence of the Holy See’s Secretariat of State, as well as notes and memoranda from meetings with diplomats and Church leaders from various countries during the period of the Second World War. These documents were culled from Vatican archives by a team of four Jesuit scholars between 1965 and 1981. The documents are published in the languages in which they were originally

written (primarily Italian, French and German, but also some in Latin and English), but the editorial commentary is in French. Volume three is split into two books, which accounts for occasional reference to 12 volumes.

The archives from which the ADSS collection was taken remain sealed. Many researchers, this author included, would like to have access to the archives, but like most world governments, the Holy See keeps records confidential for an extended period of time to make certain that secret governmental information will not be revealed and that living people will not be embarrassed by disclosure of private information. Only recently were most (not all) of the American OSS World War II files made public, and similar French and British files also remain secret. (One member of the Pius XII study group, Fr. Gerald P. Fogarty from the University of Virginia, tried to do research in the recently declassified OSS archives, but every relevant document was still under seal.)

The difference between the Catholic-Jewish study group and most other researchers is that most researchers accept governmental restrictions and work with the best available evidence to reach an accurate historical understanding. In the case of Pope Pius XII, the ADSS gave researchers a rare opportunity to see archives that would not normally be available. Unfortunately, although they agreed to study those documents when they accepted their positions, many members of the study group failed to carry out this task.

A report on the contents of the 11 volumes could have been a tremendous service for those in search of the truth. A careful study of those documents makes clear that Pope Pius XII was very concerned with the welfare of all people, including Jews. In fact, these volumes contain enough information to refute all the recent slanderous charges against the wartime Pope. Unfortunately, from the very beginning, the study group was more interested in getting into secret archives than in learning what took place during the war.

At the time of the group's formation, Leon Feldman, Emeritus Professor of History at Rutgers University and "Jewish coordinator" for the study group said he thought there was a "smoking gun" in the archives and that was the reason the Vatican kept them closed. Professor Robert Wistrich of Hebrew University told the press that to read the volumes without having access to the archives would be "a farce." Of course, that was exactly the charge that the team accepted.

In accepting the mandate to study the ADSS, members of the study group agreed to pursue their work in a clearly defined way. They did not, however, drop their demand for full access to the archives. In fact, that demand was ultimately placed ahead of the desire to find the truth. This became evident when the team traveled to Rome to meet with Vatican officials.

In April 2000, Dr. Eugene Fisher, Catholic coordinator for the study group, called Fr. Peter Gumpel, *relator* for the cause of Pius XII's sainthood, wanting to set up a meeting at which the study group could question him. Fr. Gumpel agreed, but he asked that questions be submitted to him in advance so that he would have time to prepare his answers with supporting documentation.

The study group ultimately came to Rome during the month of October 2000. About two weeks prior to their arrival, they sent ahead 47 questions for Fr. Gumpel. Inexplicably, the questions had been formatted as a "Preliminary Report." The charge given to the group had not called for a preliminary report. It seems to have been an invention of the scholars designed to apply more pressure on the Vatican to open sealed archives.

When Fr. Gumpel saw the 47 questions, he thought that the study group wanted them answered, and he felt that it would take several days to address them all. As it ended up, however, he was given only three hours with the group. As such, he was able to address only a handful of questions.

Perhaps that is just as well. The vocal representatives of the group (notably Wistrich, Reich, and Dr. Michael Marrus of the University of Toronto), made clear that they were not interested in answers to their questions. They wanted Fr. Gumpel to join in their call for the opening of the archives. Nothing short of that would be acceptable.

Fr. Gumpel pointed out that while it is legitimate for a historian to seek archival information, there was sufficient information already available to answer the questions that the study group had presented to him. He set about answering the 47 questions, with references to available Vatican documents, books, memoirs, and other archival sources.

The study group would have nothing to do with this; the scholars wanted Vatican archives. At one point, Seymour Reich even said that Fr. Gumpel could not possibly answer the group's question, because the question did not ask what happened, but what the archives indicated had happened. (Fr. Fogarty and Fr. John Morley, another member of the group, did however thank Fr. Gumpel for identifying relevant authority that had not been considered by the group.)

Fr. Gumpel complained about previous breaches of confidentiality on the part of the study group. He was assured that the group itself was outraged and that steps had been taken to assure that there would be no further "leaks." Unfortunately that was not the case, while the team was still in Rome, the preliminary report, with all 47 questions, was leaked to the press and published around the world.

The Associated Press called the preliminary report "explosive." The *New York Times* said it expressed the dissatisfaction of the six panel members with Vatican records. *Le Monde* of Paris said it pointed to failures of the Pope and Church. Of course, the editors of these papers thought that the preliminary report was really about Pope Pius XII. They did not know that it was nothing more than a ploy to

have the Vatican open the archives.

Having expressed regret for earlier leaks, one might have expected the study group to have issued a condemnation of this breach. Perhaps Bernard Suchecky, who was responsible, might have been suspended. Instead, certain members of the team were emboldened. Professors Marrus and Wistrich were both widely quoted as saying that the ball was now in the Vatican's court. They had posed their 47 questions, and they would await the Vatican's reply. No mention was made of answers that were provided by Fr. Gumpel, Cardinal Cassidy, Cardinal Laghi, and then Archbishop (now Cardinal) Mejía, all of whom met with the study group in Rome.

Earlier this year, when Cardinal Cassidy stepped down from his post as President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, he was replaced by Cardinal Walter Kasper, a German theologian. Cardinal Kasper was not influenced by the history that had shaped the study group up until this point. He looked at what was taking place, and he did not like it.

In an interview published June 21, 2001, Cardinal Kasper said: "The commission failed to do what it was charged to do – to read the Vatican's 11 published volumes on Pius' pontificate. They must read the 11 volumes; they have never done the work they were asked to do in a proper way." [See *Catalyst*, Dec. 2000: The Pope Pius XII Study Group: Read the Documents!, making this same point.] Regarding the leaks, he called them unacceptable, "unethical" behavior.

On the same day that the interview was published, Cardinal Kasper sent a letter to the study group asking for a "final report on this project." He noted that he did not expect the final report to provide the whole answer to these issues, nor would it signal the end of discussion on this matter. It would, however, fulfill the mandate given to the study group. Cardinal Kasper also noted that some of the 47 questions had

been answered by Fr. Gumpel and that others had been forwarded to the Vatican Secretariat of State, which controls the archives. The Cardinal also made clear that the group would not be granted access to sealed Vatican archives.

On July 20, in a letter to Cardinal Kasper, the five remaining scholars on the team (Dr. Eva Fleischner having resigned for personal reasons) suspended their work, saying that they could not complete their assignment without “access in some reasonable manner to additional archival material.” This is when everything really began to fall apart.

Although Cardinal Kasper did no more than restate the agreement that had been in place from the very beginning of the project, Professor Wistrich imputed bad faith to the Holy See. “The Vatican is not really interested in allowing us to pursue our work further. Whatever expectation they had of the panel – that we would give carte blanche to Pius’s beatification, or that the situation would be defused without probing too deeply – they were wrong... They moved the goalposts.” Seymour Reich, expressed “deep disappointment” that the Vatican would not open all its wartime archives to the scholars and suggested that the letter from the scholars was a form of protest.

Fr. Fogarty then issued a statement disassociating himself from what Reich had said. Eugene Fisher also condemned “Reich’s attempt to twist the statement of the scholars to say what it did not intend to say.” He called it “inexplicable and inexcusable.” Unfortunately, the mainstream press picked up on Wistrich and Reich, not on the rebuttals.

The truth, as explained by Fr. Fogarty, was that “there were two different sets of expectations and two different agendas from the very beginning, and they finally clashed.”

Some members of the study group viewed the project as a vehicle to press for open access to the archives, but that was

never their charge. They were supposed to conduct a thorough study of the ADSS. "It is a fact, we could not work together with some people wanting greater access and others saying we can do more work; there was no point in saying we could work together as a group," Fr. Fogarty explained.

Had the group carried out its assignment without delving into polemics and political posturing, it could have answered almost all of the questions about Pope Pius XII's conduct during the war. Those documents, which were meticulously edited by world-renowned scholars, make clear that the Pope was not silent, that he assisted the Allies, opposed Nazi racial atrocities, and that the Church fed, sheltered, and clothed victims of all races, religions, and nationalities.

A historian might legitimately ask whether a different approach to the situation would have worked better to oppose the Nazis, but the documents leave no doubt about where the Holy See stood. Pope Pius did everything that he thought possible and appropriate to help Jews and other victims of the Nazis. Had the group carried out its assignment, that would have been made clear, and that would have gone a long way toward healing the division between Catholics and Jews. Unfortunately, that is not what happened.

Rather than seeking truth, too many people put their personal desires to enter the sealed archives above the agreed aim of the project. They did this at the expense of both truth and the continued viability of the project. The results that they obtained only raised suspicions and doubts. What a shame. What a wasted opportunity

The Papacy Under Attack

by Robert P. Lockwood

(5/2001)

In recent years there have been a series of books that have dealt both directly and indirectly with the accusation that Pope Pius XII bore responsibility for the Holocaust in World War II. Beginning with John Cornwell's "Hitler's Pope,"¹ through Garry Wills' "Papal Sin"² and concluding – at least at this point in time – with James Carroll's "Constantine's Sword,"³ all three books managed a short life on the *New York Times*' bestsellers list. The books have been influential in continuing the propaganda campaign that Pope Pius XII was a silent witness to the Holocaust who did virtually nothing to help the Jews. The charge is made that Pius refused to condemn Nazi atrocities because he wanted to maintain a strong Germany to serve as a counter-balance to the Soviet Union in Europe. At heart, these critics claim, Pius was more interested in maintaining and reinforcing a developing papal absolutism than in facing the Nazis. And this campaign for "papal absolutism" is at the heart of the papacy of Pope John Paul II they charge.

Each book, of course, has its own particular emphasis in addressing the subject. Cornwell portrays Pius as a monarchial pope with an anti-Semitic background whose primary agenda was increased centralization of Church power within the papacy. As such, Cornwell maintained that Pius XII "was the ideal Pope for Hitler's unspeakable plan. He was Hitler's pawn. He was Hitler's Pope."⁴ While Wills' disavows any in depth exploration of the papal role in the Holocaust, he assumes that Pius had a basically pro-German stance out of fear of Communism, and was locked into the Vatican's "own sorry history with regard to the Jews."⁵ This analysis of Pius

and the Church during World war II serves to introduce Wills' central thesis that the Church has in place "structures of deceit" created to artificially prop-up papal power.

Carroll relies primarily on Cornwell as a source for the role of Pius in the Holocaust⁶ He echoes Cornwell's theory of Pius as solely concerned with papal power, but also sees Pius' alleged lack of action in the face of the Holocaust as historically determined by 2,000 years of Church anti-Semitism, rooted in Scripture, theology and tradition. Echoing Wills, he states that "the Vatican's preference for its own power, as it pursued its vision of an absolutist papacy, was only a version of the choice countless Europeans made to pursue their own welfare without regard for those outside the circle of their concern – the Jews."⁷ Carroll argues that anti-Semitism was so central to Catholic thought that "Hitler's anti-Jewish program, even at its extreme, was simply not that offensive to the broad population of Catholics."⁸

The critical aspect of all three books is that authors identifying themselves as Catholic wrote them, and all have a different agenda in mind than merely condemning Pope Pius XII. One can quickly determine that Pius and the Holocaust, even in Cornwell's account, are only tools for the unifying premise that underlies all three books: that the papacy itself is the primary target, both in general, and specifically the papacy of Pope John Paul II. All three books use Pius XII, and exploit the Holocaust, as a means to make points in an internal Catholic debate over papal primacy – meaning the extent of papal juridical authority within the Church – and papal infallibility. While Cornwell's focus is narrower than both Wills and Carroll, to see any of these books as a serious investigation into Catholic-Jewish relations, and how the Church under Pius responded to the Holocaust, is to misunderstand their purpose.

Virtually all secular reviews highlighted these

books because of their charges concerning the role of Pius and the Church in regard to the Jews during the World War, and as negative portrayals of the Church in history. Yet, these are derivative works in their treatment of Pius XII, with little original scholarship or research on the era, by authors who are not historians.⁹ Their primary purpose is to attack the papacy as an institution within the Catholic Church as it is led by Pope John Paul II, rather than to more clearly understand the role Pope Pius XII played during the war years. Pius XII is simply a tool for a radical internal Church agenda. As is the Holocaust.

Pius XII is a convenient tool for a number of reasons. First, of course, he was the last pre-Vatican II pope. As such, identifying Pope John Paul II with him makes it far easier to paint the present pontiff as a reactionary figure representing the past rather than the future. Identifying the two means that discrediting the image of Pius XII, discredits the image of Pope John Paul II. Second, the movement for the beatification of Pius XII, protested in certain Jewish quarters, provided a useful spark. The possible beatification of Pius XII, along with the actual beatification of Pius IX in September 2000, could be portrayed as an endorsement of an "imperial papacy" by John Paul II (forgetting the fact that Pope John XXIII was beatified at the same time). Third, there was a small corpus of historical works in the last 40 years aimed at Pius XII that could supply ready secondary resources to build a case against him. Finally, there was a growing public awareness of the anti-Pius historical view in regard to the Holocaust with few contrary portraits. Pius has had over the last 40 years a good number of detractors but a comparatively small number of defenders, until recently. There was, therefore, a casual acceptance of the possibility of a negative portrait of Pius that made it unnecessary to build a rigorous case against him. Particularly in Wills and Carroll, the anti-Pius perspective is simply assumed, rather than carefully argued.

The Pius 'animus'

For the 13 years after World War II ended until his death on October 9, 1958, Pius XII was universally acclaimed for his efforts to save Jewish lives in the face of the Holocaust. There were no accusations during this period of a “silent” pontiff with pro-Nazi leanings. At the time of his death, numerous national and international Jewish organizations praised his wartime record, reflecting a 1942 *New York Times* Christmas editorial during the war that called Pius “a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent.” (Such Jewish praise would be dismissed later as Israeli politicking, rather than heartfelt – which is a rather cruel accusation to make, considering that at the time many of those praising Pius had lived through the Holocaust itself.)

The myth of Pius XII began with a 1963 drama by Rolf Hochhuth, an obscure German playwright. In “Der Stellvertreter” (“The Representative” or “The Deputy”) Hochhuth charged that Pius XII maintained an icy silence during the Holocaust. “The Deputy” is readily dismissed as serious history.¹⁰ Yet, five years after his death, the reputation of Pius was beginning to face serious historical revisionism.

Why this revisionism? Pius XII was unpopular with certain circles for the anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist agenda of his post-war pontificate. The Church under Pius XII was seen as the leading conservative force in post-war Europe. This was a period where leftist sentiments in the West were still tied to a flirtation with Communism, if no longer supportive of Stalinism. In leftist academic circles, particularly in Italy in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Pope Pius was seen as the standard-bearer for a political crusade, establishing the Church as a universal anti-Communist force. There was a concerted effort to

discredit both that crusade, and the pontificate that was perceived as generating it.

The general charges against Pius XII were that while he was not pro-Nazi during the war, he hated Bolshevism more than he hated Hitler. This lead him to ignore the fate of the Jews so Nazi Germany would not be demonized. It was claimed that the wartime pontiff's strategy was to maintain a strong Germany as a bulwark against Communism. He refused to excommunicate Hitler and his Nazi cronies with Catholic backgrounds, or to speak out boldly against Nazi atrocities, because he did not want to inflame anti-German passions as a strong Germany would be necessary to restrain the Soviet Union. Some even charged that the Vatican policy under Pope Pius XII covertly supported Nazi Germany in its attack on the Soviet Union, with papal plans to serve as the negotiator between Germany and the Western allies to follow after Communism's collapse. When that strategy failed, the pope then helped to create the anti-Soviet atmosphere that resulted in the "Cold War" in the late 1940s and 1950s. Hochhuth's charge of papal "silence" fit the theory that Pius XII refused to publicly criticize Nazi Germany's attacks on the Jews in order that the country could serve effectively as an ongoing block to Soviet expansion.

The theory, of course, has never been documented because there is no evidence that even suggests such a papal strategy. The 2000 interim report of the international Catholic-Jewish commission formed to study the Vatican role in the Holocaust, a group not in any way particularly friendly to the legacy of Pius, could find no such evidence of an anti-Soviet, pro-Nazi Vatican strategy during the war. The sources for such theories, such as they exist, were generally Nazi wishful-thinking that hoped for Vatican support in the war once the Soviet Union became the enemy. Yet, the myth persists and is cited as a major motivating factor in papal complicity with Nazism in all three books.^{[11](#)}

Pius certainly recognized Stalinism for what it was. The Church under his leadership, as well as the prior pontificate of Pius XI, had no illusions about what Communist domination would mean, both for Europe and the Church. Yet all evidence points to the fact that the Vatican under Pius XII recognized Nazi Germany as the far greater immediate threat. By August 1933, when Hitler had become German chancellor, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII, expressed to the British representative to the Holy See his disgust with the Nazis and “their persecution of the Jews, their proceedings against political opponents, the reign of terror to which the whole nation was subjected.” When it was stated to him that Germany now had a strong leader to deal with the communists, Cardinal Pacelli responded that the Nazis were infinitely worse.¹² More important, his actions during the war belied any favorable strategy toward Nazi Germany at the Soviet Union’s expense. After Hitler ordered the invasion of the Soviet Union, the question quickly arose over aiding communists in the war against the Nazis. The issue became particularly important in the United States where aid was routinely supplied to the Allies and was to be extended to the Soviet Union. A number of bishops raised the issue and, very quickly, Pius XII settled the affair noting that aid to the “people” of the Soviet Union was not aid to communism. When the Soviets became part of the Allied war effort, Pius assured President Franklin Roosevelt that he would not issue any condemnations of Soviet atrocities against the Church. There is simply no evidence that Pius collaborated or compromised in any way with Nazi Germany in its war with the Soviet Union.

Of course, the whole idea of the “silence” of Pius XII – whatever the alleged strategies behind it – is a misreading of history if meant to imply a lack of papal concern or actions on behalf of the Jews. What the Church was able to accomplish in World War II under the direction of Pius XII was what no other agency, government or entity at the time was able to accomplish: saving Jewish lives. Pulitzer Prize

winning historian John Toland, no friend of Pius XII, summed it up when he wrote that the Church under the leadership of Pius “saved the lives of more Jews than all other churches, religious institutions and rescue organizations combined.”¹³ Pinchas Lapide, Israeli consul in Italy, estimated that the actions of Pius XII saved over 860,000 Jewish lives during World War II. If that were an exaggeration by half, and then half again, it would record more Jewish lives saved by the Church than by any other entity at the time. The critics of Pius have yet to suggest a strategy that he could have implemented that would have saved more lives.¹⁴

Despite the clear historical record, “The Deputy” took on far greater importance than it deserved. Carroll tells the story that as a young seminarian, “we passed contraband copies of The Deputy from hand to hand as if it were pornography.”¹⁵ Leftists used it as a means to discredit an anti-Communist papacy. Instead of Pius working with every means available to the Holy See to rescue European Jews in the face of complete Nazi entrapment, an image was created of Pius XII as a political schemer who would willingly sacrifice Jewish lives to stop the spread of Communism. “The Deputy” was merely the mouthpiece for an ideological interpretation of history that helped create the myth of a “silent” Pope Pius XII doing nothing in the face of Nazi slaughter.

This secular animus against Pius after his death had been generated throughout the 1960s and well into the 1970s. The animus against Pius within certain Catholic circles was certainly influenced by this agenda, but was not overly strong during the papacies of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. Pope Pius XII remained a popular figure after his death among Catholics as a whole, admired for his anti-Communism, his war record, and a general perception of his personal sanctity. Questions about Pope Pius XII in certain Catholic circles, particularly in the United States, were limited to

concerns that his staunch anti-Communism had generated early support in the American hierarchy, particularly from Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, for American involvement in Vietnam. But for the most part, Vatican II (1962-1965) and its aftermath overshadowed the papacy of Pius XII. If anything, he was viewed by progressives as a quaint remnant of a Church that was dramatically renewed after his papacy, rather than a regressive symbol or an anti-Semite with Nazi sympathies. It would not be until the papacy of Pope John Paul II that a stronger reaction began to develop against Pius within certain Catholic circles. As is clearly seen in Cornwell's book, that response against Pope Pius XII generally developed out of a reaction against the papacy of Pope John Paul II.

At the conclusion of "Hitler's Pope," Cornwell's case against Pius is revealed for what it is: an attack on the papacy as exercised by Pope John Paul II. "The progressives believed that this was a Pope (John Paul II) to implement the reforms of Vatican II. The traditionalists, however, trusted that a prelate reared in the Catholicism of Poland would restore the old disciplines and values. Few suspected the extent to which he would disappoint the progressive side of the Church divide."¹⁶ Under Pope John Paul II, Cornwell charges, "Pacelli's monolithic pyramidal model of the Church has once again reasserted itself, and the metaphors of the 'pilgrim Church on the move' and the 'People of God' are seldom employed. Pluralism and collegiality are characterized as antagonistic to central authority."¹⁷

Cornwell's essential theory is echoed in both Wills and Carroll. "So what accounts not only for the silence of Pope Pius XII, but for Eugenio Pacelli's complicity with Hitler in the early years?" Carroll asks, assuming both that alleged silence and alleged complicity. "The early years offer the clue, for it was then that Pacelli's determination to put the accumulation and defense of papal power above everything else showed itself for what it was. Above the fate of the

Jews, certainly, but also above the fate of the Catholic Church in Europe.”¹⁸ Wills portrays Pius as perhaps an unwitting victim, at best, of “structures of deceit” that force people to lie to defend papal authority. While stating that the actual role of Pope Pius XII during the war is still under debate¹⁹ Wills clearly presents his position by claiming that if Pius is canonized it will force his supporters to “make false claims in order to defend the words of a saint,” which “would make him the source of a new round of deceit structured into past dishonesties.”²⁰ Wills entire thesis is that in order to artificially prop-up papal power, the Church engages in ongoing theological, sacramental, historical and disciplinary lying. Pope Pius XII did what he had to do in the war, according to Wills, to maintain these structures of deceit that support papal power. Those who defend him today are “papalotors” caught up in these same structures.

All three books reference their views on Pope Pius XII both forward to Pope John Pail II and back to Pope Pius IX (Pio Nono) and the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). That Council’s definition of papal infallibility is seen as the foundation of Pius’ alleged obsession with a monarchical papacy, and Pope John Paul II’s exercise of papal authority. All three authors tend to mix the issue of papal infallibility – the Catholic understanding that when the pope solemnly defines doctrine he speaks infallibly – with papal juridical authority, which is the extent of the papacy’s authority within the institutional Church over matters such as the appointment of bishops. While these are two separate and distinct issues – historically and theologically – all three authors tend to lump them together.

Cornwell begins his book after Italian national troops had seized the Papal States from Pope Pius IX. He invents a picture of Pope Pius IX just prior to the First Vatican Council that dramatically fits the theme of a papally-

rigged council that would impose a new understanding of the papacy on the Church, an understanding that would determine the reaction of Pius XII to the rise of Hitlerism, World War II and the Holocaust, as well as that being resurrected presently by Pope John Paul II:

“Pio Nono had erected upon himself the protective battlements of God’s citadel; within, he raised the standard of the Catholic faith, based on the word of God as endorsed by himself, the Supreme Pontiff, Christ’s Vicar upon earth. Outside were the standards of the Antichrist, man-centered ideologies that had been sowing error ever since the French Revolution, And the poisonous fruit, he declared, had even affected the Church itself: movements to reduce the power of the popes by urging national Churches independent of Rome. Yet just as influential was a long-established tendency from the opposite extreme: ultramontaniam, a call for unchallenged papal power that would shine out across the world, transcending all national and geographic boundaries. Pio Nono now began to prepare for the dogmatic declaration of just such an awe-inspiring primacy. The world would know how supreme he was by a dogma, a fiat, to be held by all under pain of excommunication.”²¹

Wills describes the First Vatican Council’s definition of papal infallibility as a rigged event strong-armed by Pius IX on an unwilling hierarchy; where opposition was silenced and careers threatened. He quotes Lord John Acton, castigating the bishops who had “yielded to tyranny”: “They approved what they were called on to reform, and solemnly blessed with their lips what their hearts knew to be accursed. The Court of Rome became thenceforth reckless in its scorn of the opposition, and proceeded in the belief that there was no protest they would not forget, no principle they would not betray, rather than defy the Pope in his wrath.”²² Carroll states that “Vatican I hauled the Church

higher into the misanthropic wind, a course from which not even John XXIII, given his successors, was able to bring about.”²³

The essential argument of each author is that the First Vatican Council of the 19th Century fundamentally changed the Church by creating out of whole cloth a doctrine of papal infallibility. This doctrine greatly enhanced a centralization of juridical power within the Church under the papacy. It was the machinations of Pope Pius IX, resenting the end of the temporal power of the papacy, which caused this allegedly revolutionary development. Pope Pius XII was raised in the Church in an atmosphere where this new papal power was being codified and confirmed. As Secretary of State under Pope Pius XI, and as pope, this papal autocracy would be the driving force behind every decision and policy, including Church reaction to Nazism and the Holocaust. Wills, Cornwell and Carroll portray Cardinal Pacelli under Pius XI selling out the Catholic Center Party of Germany to the Nazis in order to directly control the German Church, without regard to what the Nazis ascent to power would mean, particularly to the Jews. His alleged silence in the face of the Holocaust is explained as simply another example of papal grandiosity, as speaking out might compromise his neutrality and not allow him to be the mediator of world peace. The co-joined narrative continues that after Pius is gone, the Second Vatican Council is called by Pope John XXIII to limit this papal autocracy, but is undermined by his death and his predecessor, Paul VI, who was trained under Pope Pius XII. Pope John Paul II is then portrayed as engaged in a complete dismantling of whatever reforms the Second Vatican Council managed to enunciate in the areas of collegiality.

Carroll gives his own synopsis of this mini-history: “Liberalism and modernism were seen as bearing the destruction of civilization itself...so the Catholic strategy of arming the leader of the Church with the spiritual mace of

infallibility made some sense....Vatican II would do little to alter that course...Pius IX represented to Catholic liberals of my generation the Church's great stumble. We associated him with old battles that would never need to be refought, or so we thought. We had a first hint that we were wrong when the Vatican revoked Hans Kung's *missio canonica*, his right to teach as a Catholic, in 1979. Kung was the dominant theological model of our generation, and what brought the wrath of the Vatican down on him, revealingly, was his book *Infallible? An Inquiry*. Published in 1970, the work drew the Vatican's full fire once John Paul II had come to the throne in 1978, and it soon became clear that he took Kung's challenge personally. John Paul II, holding back a second tidal wave of liberalism, had reason to identify with Pius XI's resistance to the first wave. Both men were shaped by early traumas, both saw the very existence of the Church at stake, and both, for that reason, when their authority to defend the Church was challenged, responded by claiming that authority more resolutely than ever. It was with survival in mind that Pius XI demanded the ultimate gesture of support from the bishops of his Vatican Council."²⁴

All of which is a simplistic reading of history tied to a fixation on the papacy and alleged papal power. This is why the authors feel little compunction exploiting the Holocaust for matters of internal Church debate. Their obsession is with the papacy as conducted by Pope John Paul II, whom they tie intimately with Pius IX and Pius XII. Belittling Pius IX and tying Pius XII directly to the Holocaust are means to an end: pushing a particular vision of Catholicism and the papacy to which Pope John Paul II stands in stark contradiction.

Since there is so much historical distortion here, it is briefly necessary to revisit two concepts: The First Vatican Council's definition of papal infallibility in 1870, and the juridical authority of the papacy as seen in the

appointment of bishops, which Cornwell calls “the key issue.”²⁵ The issues raised in these books concerning Pius and the Holocaust are only a front for these two issues that are critical to the agenda of all three authors.

In 1867, when Pope Pius IX called for a general council of the Church., it was originally thought that the Council would be pastoral in tone, dealing with the need to update Church canonical law and the status of the growing foreign missions. However, it soon became obvious that there was a need to discuss the authority of the papal office itself. Many of the events of the previous 40 years had centered on the office of the papacy and the nature of papal authority and there were various movements at play within the Church. On the one hand, a strong movement – referred to as “ultramontanism” – believed that papal authority must be understood in virtually limitless terms. Supporters of this view of the papacy believed that a strong papacy provided protection to the local Catholic communities overwhelmed by aggressively anti-Catholic states and stood as a voice for the universality of the Church. This was particularly evident in states where the Church was under attack or subject to government control. On the other hand, there were historic movements such as Gallicanism which saw the pope as simply a “senior bishop among bishops,” which would dramatically limit papal authority in the face of national Churches. Similarly, there were strains of Conciliarism that sought to center the authority of the Church in general councils. There was even “Josephenism” which would subject the local Church to the control of the State.

But at this point in the 19th Century, many of those movements to limit the historic nature of the papacy had lost serious momentum within the Church. The emergence of the modern liberal states had reconfirmed to many within the Church the vital importance of the ancient belief of the central authority of the bishop of Rome as the successor of

St. Peter. Virtually no one in the hierarchy of the Church outright rejected the theological concept of papal infallibility – that when the Pope formally addressed matters of faith and morals as the Vicar of Christ, he was guided by the Holy Spirit and therefore not subject to error. However, it had never been clearly defined as to the extent of that infallibility and that is where true divisions existed. Examples were papal encyclicals such as the controversial *Syllabus of Errors* of Pius IX (1864) – was that an infallible papal statement, true for all times and for all people? Was every public statement of the pope to be considered infallible? The ultramontanes certainly believed so.

Pope Pius IX certainly leaned heavily toward the ultramontane definition of infallibility. Others, however, were far less certain. There were two prominent schools within the hierarchy, all in minority to the ultramontanes. There were some that rejected outright any definition of papal infallibility. While acknowledging the authority of the pope, they thought it theologically dangerous to attempt to define it. They believed that the authority of the Church had historically existed, that all Catholics believed it, and to define it would simply mean to limit it, or to misunderstand it. Others, called “inopportunists,” felt that in the disrupted state of the world at the time, it was not “opportune” to define papal infallibility. This was the position of Cardinal John Henry Newman of England, as well as a number of prominent American bishops. They believed that a definition would cause difficulties within the liberal democracies for the Church, as well as in relations with other Christian traditions. Finally, there were extreme anti-infallibilists such as Lord John Acton of England, a prominent Catholic layman, who dreaded any such definition.

Acton believed that a definition of papal infallibility would somehow contradict the historical fact

that there had been bad popes and bad decisions of the past. As with many critics of infallibility, he defined it in his own mind too broadly, assuming that papal infallibility applied to virtually any papal policy or papal pronouncement. Acton also believed that authority in the Church should be greatly limited. His teacher, the historian and theologian Father Ignaz von Dollinger, shared many of Acton's ideas. Both are heroes to Garry Wills in *Papal Sin*.

The general accusation – shared by Wills – was that the Council was manhandled by Pius IX and the Curia to force a definition of papal infallibility not in keeping with Catholic tradition. Yet even Acton, who loathed Pius and looked for curial conspiracies everywhere, had to acknowledge that debates were open and ideas freely exchanged. He wrote in his journal, "Nobody molested on account of hostile opinion. Letters carefully examined, and much espionage. But no serious hindrance put in the way of distributing documents, pamphlets, etc. Newspapers frequently stopped; but distributed to the bishops, so that their effect on the course of events was not prevented."²⁶ In fact, the debate over the definition of papal infallibility went on for months. And the final definition of papal infallibility fell far short of the desires of the ultramontanes. Consensus emerged, except for extremists on each side, which spelled out a definition of papal infallibility clearly in line with Church tradition and the theology of the papacy. The Council proclaimed no new teaching that extended papal authority beyond a point the Church had understood for centuries. Subsequent popes have issued one *ex cathedra* statement (Pope Pius XII defining Catholic teaching on the Assumption of Mary in 1950) and did so only after extensive consultation with the world's bishops. The definition of papal infallibility as determined by the First Vatican Council was not created or mandated by Pope Pius IX. It was a reaffirmation of a consistent teaching of the Church as subsequent history has clearly shown.

Wills and Cornwell then focus on the area of episcopal appointments, seeing this as a critical area in the late 19th and early 20th Century where papal juridical “control” of the local Church expanded enormously. Both see this as a nefarious plot to extend papal power. Cornwell: *“The ideology of papal primacy, as we have known it within living memory, is an invention of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.* (Italics his own for emphasis.) In other words, there was a time, before modern means of communication, when the pyramidal model of Catholic authority – whereby a single man in white robes rules the Church in a vastly unequal power relationship – did not exist...The more elevated the Pontiff, the smaller and less significant the faithful. The more responsible and authoritative the Pontiff, the less enfranchised the people of God, including bishops, the successors to the apostles...Pacelli, more than almost any other Vatican official of his day, helped to enhance the ideology of papal power.” [27](#)

The theory is that with the end of the Papal States in 1870, the Church attempted to replace its “temporal” power with spiritual authority. The practical means to do this was to artificially prop-up papal juridical authority through the definition of papal infallibility, wresting away from secular governments and local control the appointment of bishops, and enhancing the power of the Curia – as an extension of papal power – over local and national churches. This centralizing of power in Rome, particularly through control of the bishops, would create an alternative to the loss of temporal authority. Wills sees this “power grab” as a plot virtually from the earliest centuries of the Church that “lead papal Rome to acquire a monopoly over priestly ordination. That power was seized not from the people themselves but from political rulers who had, in time, assumed even greater control over the nomination and acclamation power of Christian communities...When ‘lay investiture’ controversies

arose, in later centuries, the power to ordain did not return to its original locus, the people of each community, but was wrested from secular rulers by an expanding and aggressive papacy."²⁸

Wills sees the First Vatican Council in 1870 and subsequent events as part of the whole: an attempt by the papacy and curialists to seize power through the control of the appointment of bishops and, therefore, priestly ordinations. Of course, Wills sees all Catholic history and belief as a manipulated series of events whose cumulative aim is the enhancement of papal power. Sacramental theology, Scripture, a male priesthood, priestly celibacy, Christ's atonement on the Cross, the Mass, Marian devotion – all become to Wills part of the "structure of deceit" that is fundamental to the Church. And at the heart of this structure of deceit is the papacy. The true Church, according to Wills, "would not bring in substitutes for the Holy Spirit, making the Pope the monarch of the Church...(Augustine) would have said that the new papal sin, of deception, is worse than the vivid sins of material greed, proud ambition, or sexual license. It is spiritual sin, an interior baffling of the Spirit's access to the soul. It is a cold act, achieved by careful maneuvering and manipulation, a calculated blindness, a shuttering of the mind against the light."²⁹

While Wills argues his point, and Cornwell sees Pacelli as the agent provocateur for amassing papal power even in the face of the Holocaust, both are reading evil into a centuries-long movement by the Church to free itself from local control. The "lay investiture" controversies were considered fundamental to reform of the Church. It was a centuries-long attempt to free the Church from the control of the local rulers, the single most critical cause of hierarchical and local Church scandal throughout history. It is true that the movement to secure the appointment of bishops exclusively through the Holy See is a development that

accelerated over the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th century. But the historical reasons for this are hardly the sinister plots suggested by Cornwell, Wills and, eventually, Carroll. The governments of Europe that, to varying degrees, still had power over the appointments of bishops had become aggressively secular. While this was never an issue in the United States, the Church had to establish its freedom from State control and dominance throughout Europe (The Austrian monarchy still had veto power over the election of popes in the early 20th century.) Additionally, the Holy See certainly provided a counterbalance for local Catholic populations and Church structures facing extensive restrictions and interference from the modern states. Securing the right to manage its own affairs, including the appointment of bishops, was far from creeping papal absolutism. It was, in fact, liberating the Church from State domination. (In our own day, this is still very much an issue, particularly in China, where the State refuses the right of the Vatican to appoint bishops and has set-up its own "Patriotic National Church.")

Of course, the point here is not to argue over the extent of legitimate papal juridical power within Catholic tradition, or over the definition of papal infallibility. Rather, it is to see these books for what they are: exploitations of the Holocaust to argue for a particular anti-papal viewpoint within the Church. Pope Pius XII is not the enemy, even though Cornwell paints him large. The enemy is Pope John Paul II, who Cornwell sees as "Pius XII Redivivus," and fears that a "papal autocracy, carried to the extreme, can only demoralize and weaken Christian communities." He sees the John Paul II model of the papacy as reaffirming "the right of the man in the white robe to rule autocratically from the apex, with a domineering Curia imposing conformity, and the diocesan bishops abdicating their proper authority and freedom. This vision of the Church is increasingly inimical to Christian ecumenism, insistently male-dominated and celibate.

Marian devotion prevails, with an emphasis on miraculous and gnostic-style revelation.”³⁰

Carroll’s book neatly sums-up the similar agenda of all three authors in his call for a Vatican III at the end of “Constantine’s Sword.”³¹ Again, a book that is sold and reviewed as an exploration of the roots of the Holocaust concludes with a litany of bromides for Church reform aimed at limiting the papacy and recreating Catholic theology, Scripture and belief to the author’s own liking. The purpose here, again, is not to argue with the author’s wants and desires. Rather, it is to reflect on the purpose of all three of these non-histories sold as histories that use Pius and the Holocaust to put forth their own anti-papal agenda for Church reform.

Carroll has written a 608-page book whose chronology begins with the founding of the future Jerusalem in the Middle Bronze Age and concludes with the beatification of Pope Pius IX by John Paul II in September 2000. He has put all this together as virtual introduction to the last 70-odd pages that outline his personal agenda for Church reform. Carroll argues that a Third Vatican Council is necessary because, reflecting Wills and Cornwell, the Second Vatican Council, a historic beginning, was undermined by Pope Paul VI, a “devoted factotum to Pius XII.”³² Pope Paul VI turned back the reforming trend of the Second Vatican Council, in a “program of medieval restoration” that “has been vigorously continued by Pope John Paul II.”³³

Carroll’s Third Vatican Council would address, among other items, the anti-Jewish texts of the New Testament that show that the Church, even in its first generation, was capable of betraying the message of Jesus. This would establish once and for all that ‘the Church as such’ can sin.”³⁴ Vatican III will then abandon the “primary-enforcing

ideas of Roman supremacy and papal infallibility.”³⁵ The “doctrine of papal infallibility amounts to the low point in the long story of patriarchy, a legitimization of Church exceptionalism, a reversal of the meaning that Jesus gave to ministry, and, finally, an abuse of power.”³⁶

Vatican III should have a “new Christology” that abandons concepts such as the immortality of the soul, or Christ’s death as atonement for sin. Freed from this and the papacy, the Church will be able “to embrace a pluralism of belief and worship, of religion and no religion, that honors God by defining God as beyond every human effort to express God.”³⁷ The Church in Vatican III will abandon “its internal commitment to methods that undergird totalitarianism”³⁸ The Church will embrace the democratic ideal and abandon “the idea that there is one objective and absolute truth, and that its custodian is the Church.”³⁹ Bishops should be chosen by the people, the whole clerical caste eradicated, and women ordained (though ordination to exactly what is never clarified).

Wills shares most of the same agenda. Cornwell defines his goals, in sympathy with “progressive” elements within the Church as: to “continue to declare that the Pope and the Curia have failed to apply the crucial decision of the Council for collegiality. They are happy to forgo the certainties of a pope who provides an infallible mechanism as the need arises. They deplore the machinery whereby the Pope intervenes to appoint bishops the world over, frequently against local wishes, for that is not the way in which colleges are formed or work. They want a Pope who will preside over the Church in charity as a final court of appeal. They argue that the modern ideology of papal power lacks tradition, that it rejects the historic wisdom and authority of the conciliar Church.”⁴⁰

In his 2001 book "Papal Primacy in the Third Millennium"⁴¹ Russell Shaw describes the movement within certain Catholic circles to "tame the pope." With varying degrees of radical approaches, he describes this movement as "removing authority from the papacy through a systematic program of decentralization, and vesting it in other places – the Synod of Bishops, national bishops' conferences, local or 'particular' churches (that is, dioceses), perhaps even other structures that don't yet exist. The watchwords of this decentralizing program are collegiality, subsidiarity, inculturation, pluralism, and – sometimes – democracy."⁴² Shaw cites Father Richard McBrien's 1973 book, "The Remaking of the Church" as an example of this post-Vatican II advocacy of limitations on papal authority. Father McBrien, sharing the disappointment of Wills, Carroll and Cornwell over two decades before their books were published, that the alleged promise of Vatican II had not been realized, advocated his own "Agenda of Reform."

As outlined by Shaw, Father McBrien recommended: "replace 'monarchical absolutism' in Church governance with 'some form of constitutionalism'; recognize the principle of subsidiarity in Church affairs; make national pastoral councils – such as the Dutch Pastoral Council – the policy-making bodies for the Church at the national and local levels; return to 'the ancient and longstanding practice of the election of bishops by the clergy and laity'; and much else."⁴³

In a more recent proposal, Shaw notes that an American group called the "Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church" and certain European Catholics proposed in 1999 a document to serve as a "constitution" for the Church. In addition to the usual call for women's ordination, "freedom of conscience" in matters of morality, and the right to divorce and remarry, the document defines a new structure for the papacy. According to Shaw, regarding

“Church governance, the constitution declares its unreserved commitment to subsidiarity, as well as to the principle that people in leadership positions should be elected for specific terms. ‘Representative councils’ made up of elected members are the ‘principal decision-making bodies’ at every level, international, national, diocesan, and local. For the universal Church, the constitution envisages a system whereby, every ten years, the national Councils would elect a five-hundred-member General Council responsible for ‘policies and regulations concerning doctrine, morals, worship, education, social outreach...Its co-chairpersons would be the pope and a layperson elected by the council. And what of the pope? The General Council is responsible for choosing him or her, although here the constitution grows unaccountably vague.”⁴⁴ This, essentially, is the same agenda for Cornwell, Wills and Carroll.

This anti-papal trilogy of books is not a serious exploration of the Holocaust or of the role of Pius XII during the war years. Instead, the purpose in these books is to set forth an agenda, already enunciated in 1973, for “taming the papacy.” These are books focused on internal Church disputes over theology and the juridical authority of the papacy. They are merely exploiting the Holocaust – without seriously reflecting on what Pius was able to accomplish – to argue Church politics and theology in the age of Pope John Paul II. Their enemy is actually not Pius XII, but the papacy.

SUMMARY POINTS

- John Cornwell’s “Hitler’s Pope,” Garry Wills’ “Papal Sin” and James Carroll’s “Constantine’s Sword,” have been influential in popularizing the view that Pope Pius XII was a silent witness to the Holocaust who did virtually nothing to help the Jews. At heart, these critics claim, Pius was more interested in maintaining

and reinforcing a developing papal absolutism than in facing the Nazis.

- Pius and the Holocaust are only tools for the unifying premise that underlies all three books: that the papacy itself is the primary target, both in general, and specifically the papacy of Pope John Paul II.
- All three books use Pope Pius XII, and exploit the Holocaust, as a means to make points in an internal Catholic debate over papal primacy – meaning the extent of papal juridical authority within the Church – and papal infallibility. To see any of these books as a serious investigation into Catholic-Jewish relations, and how the Church under Pius responded to the Holocaust, is to misunderstand their purpose.
- Pius XII was unpopular with certain circles for the anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist agenda of his post-war pontificate. The Church under Pope Pius XII was seen as the leading conservative force in post-war Europe. This was a period where leftist sentiments in the West were still tied to a flirtation with communism, if no longer supportive of Stalinism. In leftist academic circles, particularly in Italy in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Pope Pius was seen as the standard-bearer for a political crusade, establishing the Church as a universal anti-Communist force.
- The general charges against Pius were that while he was not pro-Nazi during the war, he hated Bolshevism more than he hated Hitler. This lead him to ignore the fate of the Jews so Nazi Germany would not be demonized. It was claimed that the wartime pontiff's strategy was to maintain a strong Germany as a bulwark against communism.
- The 2000 interim report of the international Catholic-Jewish commission formed to study the Vatican role in the Holocaust, a group not in any way particularly friendly to the legacy of Pius, could find no such evidence of an anti-Soviet, pro-Nazi Vatican strategy

during the war. The sources for such theories, such as they exist, were generally Nazi wishful-thinking that hoped for Vatican support in the war once the Soviet Union became the enemy.

- The whole idea of the “silence” of Pius XII – whatever the alleged strategies behind it – is a misreading of history if meant to imply a lack of papal concern or actions on behalf of the Jews. What the Church was able to accomplish in World War II under the direction of Pius XII was what no other agency, government or entity at the time was able to accomplish: saving Jewish lives.
- It would not be until the papacy of Pope John Paul II that a stronger reaction began to develop against Pope Pius XII within certain Catholic circles. As is clearly seen in Cornwell’s book, that response against Pius generally developed out of a reaction against the papacy of Pope John Paul II.
- At the conclusion of “Hitler’s Pope,” Cornwell’s case against Pope Pius XII is revealed for what it is: an attack on the papacy as exercised by Pope John Paul II. Cornwell charges that “Pacelli’s monolithic pyramidal model of the Church has once again reasserted itself, and the metaphors of the ‘pilgrim Church on the move’ and the ‘People of God’ are seldom employed. Pluralism and collegiality are characterized as antagonistic to central authority.”
- Cornwell’s essential theory is echoed in both Wills and Carroll. “So what accounts not only for the silence of Pope Pius XII, but for Eugenio Pacelli’s complicity with Hitler in the early years?” Carroll asks, assuming both that alleged silence and alleged complicity. “The early years offer the clue, for it was then that Pacelli’s determination to put the accumulation and defense of papal power above everything else showed itself for what it was. Above the fate of the Jews, certainly, but also above the fate of the Catholic Church in Europe.” Wills portrays Pope Pius XII as perhaps an unwitting victim,

at best, of “structures of deceit” that force people to lie to defend papal authority.

- All three books reference their views on Pope Pius XII both forward to Pope John Pail II and back to Pope Pius IX (Pio Nono) and the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). That Council’s definition of papal infallibility is seen as the foundation of Pius’ alleged obsession with a monarchical papacy, and Pope John Paul II’s exercise of papal authority. All three authors tend to mix the issue of papal infallibility – the Catholic understanding that when the pope solemnly defines doctrine he speaks infallibly – with papal juridical authority, which is the extent of the papacy’s authority within the institutional Church over matters such as the appointment of bishops.
- The essential argument of each author is that Vatican I changed the Church by creating out of whole cloth a doctrine of papal infallibility that also greatly enhanced a centralization of juridical power within the Church under the papacy. It was the machinations of Pius IX, resenting the end of the temporal power of the papacy, which caused this allegedly revolutionary development. Pope Pius XII was raised in the Church in an atmosphere where this new papal power was being codified and confirmed. After Pius XII is gone, the Second Vatican Council is called by Pope John XXIII to limit this papal autocracy, but is undermined by both his death and his predecessor, Paul VI, who was trained under Pope Pius XII. Pope John Paul II is then portrayed as engaged in a complete dismantling of whatever reforms the Second Vatican Council managed to enunciate in the areas of collegiality.
- All of which is a simplistic reading of history tied to a fixation on the papacy and alleged papal power. This is why the authors feel little compunction exploiting the Holocaust for matters of internal Church debate. Their obsession is with the papacy as conducted

by Pope John Paul II who they tie intimately with Pius IX and Pius XII. Belittling Pius IX and tying Pope Pius XII directly to the Holocaust are means to an end: pushing a particular vision of Catholicism and the papacy to which Pope John Paul II stands in stark contradiction.

- The definition of papal infallibility as determined by the First Vatican Council was not created or mandated by Pope Pius IX. It was a reaffirmation of a consistent teaching of the Church as subsequent history has clearly shown.
- The theory the authors share is that with the end of the Papal States in 1870, the Church attempted to replace its “temporal” power with spiritual authority. The practical means to do this was to artificially prop-up papal juridical authority through the definition of papal infallibility, wresting away from secular governments and local control the appointment of bishops and establishing the Curia – as an extension of papal power – to limit the authority of the local churches. Wills sees this “power grab” as a plot virtually from the earliest centuries of the Church that “lead papal Rome to acquire a monopoly over priestly ordination.”
- Securing the right to manage its own affairs, including the appointment of bishops, was far from creeping papal absolutism. It was, in fact, liberating the Church from State domination.
- It is important to understand see these books for what they are: exploitations of the Holocaust to argue for a particular anti-papal viewpoint within the Church. Pope Pius XII is not the enemy, even though Cornwell paints him large. The enemy is Pope John Paul II, who Cornwell sees as “Pius XII Redivivus,” and fears that a “papal autocracy, carried to the extreme, can only demoralize and weaken Christian communities.”
- Carroll argues that a Third Vatican Council is necessary because, reflecting Wills and Cornwell, the Second

Vatican Council, a historic beginning, was undermined by Pope Paul VI, a “devoted factotum to Pius XII.” Pope Paul VI turned back the reforming trend of the Second Vatican Council, in a “program of medieval restoration” that “has been vigorously continued by Pope John Paul II.”

- The Church at Carroll’s Vatican III will abandon “its internal commitment to methods that under gird totalitarianism.” The Church will embrace the democratic ideal and abandon “the idea that there is one objective and absolute truth, and that its custodian is the Church.” Bishops should be chosen by the people, the whole clerical caste eradicated, and women ordained (though ordination to exactly what is never clarified).
- In his 2001 book “Papal Primacy in the Third Millennium,” Russell Shaw describes the movement within certain Catholic circles to “tame the pope.” With varying degrees of radical approaches, he describes this movement as “removing authority from the papacy through a systematic program of decentralization, and vesting it in other places.”
- As outlined by Shaw, Father Richard McBrien in 1973 recommended a “taming of the papacy” to include: “replace ‘monarchical absolutism’ in Church governance with ‘some form of constitutionalism’; recognize the principle of subsidiarity in Church affairs; make national pastoral councils – such as the Dutch Pastoral Council – the policy-making bodies for the Church at the national and local levels; return to ‘the ancient and longstanding practice of the election of bishops by the clergy and laity’; and much else.”
- An American group called the “Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church” and certain European Catholics proposed in 1999 a document to serve as a “constitution” for the Church. In this constitution, according to Shaw, representative councils “made up of

elected members are the 'principal decision-making bodies' at every level, international, national, diocesan, and local. For the universal Church, the constitution envisages a system whereby, every ten years, the national Councils would elect a five-hundred-member General Council responsible for 'policies and regulations concerning doctrine, morals, worship, education, social outreach...Its co-chairpersons would be the pope and a layperson elected by the council. And what of the pope? The General Council is responsible for choosing him or her, although here the constitution grows unaccountably vague." This, essentially, is the same agenda in spirit for Cornwell, Wills and Carroll.

- This anti-papal trilogy of books is not a serious exploration of the Holocaust or of the role of Pope Pius XII during the war years. Instead, the purpose in these books is to set forth an agenda, already enunciated in 1973, for "taming the papacy." These are books focused on internal Church disputes over theology and the juridical authority of the papacy. They are merely exploiting the Holocaust – without seriously reflecting on what Pope Pius XII was able to accomplish – to argue Church politics and theology in the age of Pope John Paul II.

FOOTNOTES

¹ *Hitler's Pope, the Secret History of Pius XII*, by John Cornwell (Viking Press, 1999)

² *Papal Sin, Structures of Deceit*, by Garry Wills (Doubleday, 2000)

³ *Constantine's Sword, The Church and the Jews*, by James

Carroll (Houghton Mifflin, 2001)

⁴ *Cornwell*, pp. 296-297

⁵ *Wills*, pp. 67, 68

⁶ *Carroll*, p. 681 footnote citation

⁷ *ibid.* p. 535

⁸ *ibid.* p. 534

⁹ Cornwell, a journalist by trade, claimed to have had unique access to archival material but the material he specifically cited as new has long been available – and both used and published – by students of the period.

¹⁰ Cornwell in *Hitler's Pope* describes *Der Stellvertreter* as "historical fiction based on scant documentation...(T)he characterization of Pacelli (Pius XII) as a money-grubbing hypocrite is so wide of the mark as to be ludicrous. Importantly, however, Hocchuth's play offends the most basic criteria of documentary: that such stories and portrayals are valid only if they are demonstrably true" (p. 375)

¹¹ *Cornwell*, p. 112, *Wills*, p. 35, *Carroll*, p. 511-512

¹² *Hitler, the War and the Pope*, by Ronald Rychlak (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000) p. 49

¹³ *Adolf Hitler*, John Toland (Ballantine Books, 1984) p. 549

¹⁴ For a detailed defense of the actions of Pius XII during World War II see The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights research paper, "Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust." For the most in depth book on the subject, see Rychlack's *Hitler, the War and the Pope*.

¹⁵ *Carroll* p. 44

¹⁶ *Cornwell*, p. 365

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 369

¹⁸ *Carroll*, p. 533

¹⁹ *Wills*, p. 65

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 68

²¹ *Cornwell*, p. 11-12

²² *Wills*, p. 259

²³ *Carroll*, p. 558

²⁴ *ibid.* pp. 443-444

²⁵ *Cornwell*, p. 362

²⁶ Cited in *Lord Acton*, by Rolland Hill (Yale University Press, 2000) p. 407

²⁷ *Cornwell*, pp. 3, 4

²⁸ *Wills*, p. 154

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 312

³⁰ *ibid.* p. 370

³¹ *Carroll*, pp. 547-604

³² *ibid.* p. 551

³³ *ibid.* p. 552

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 556

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 575

³⁶ *ibid.* p. 576

³⁷ *ibid.* p. 587

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 589

³⁹ *ibid.* p. 591

⁴⁰ *Cornwell*, p. 370

⁴¹ *Papal Primacy in the Third Millennium*, by Russell Shaw (Our Sunday Visitor, 2001).

⁴² *Shaw*, p. 14

⁴³ *ibid.* p. 22

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 30