

**History as Bigotry: Daniel
Goldhagen slanders the
Catholic Church**

By Rabbi David Dalin
(The Weekly Standard, 2/10/2003)

IN ITS JANUARY 21, 2002, ISSUE, the *New Republic* devoted twenty-four pages to Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's "What Would Jesus Have Done?"—one of the most virulent attacks against the Roman Catholic Church ever printed in a major American publication. Last fall, Goldhagen expanded that essay into a book, a curious and furious production entitled "A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair," about the Vatican's role during the Holocaust. Goldhagen is no stranger to controversy. His 1996 *Hitler's Willing Executioners* argued that blame for the Holocaust should be placed on all Germans—for "eliminationist" anti-Semitism was widely spread among prewar Germans and intrinsic to the German character. The Nazi exterminations could occur because the vast majority of Germans were already predisposed to kill Jews. Though Goldhagen gained international celebrity, his book's simplistic argument was widely criticized by serious scholars and historians.

In *A Moral Reckoning*, Goldhagen's argument is, once again, simplistic. It's dishonest and misleading as well. He identifies Christianity, and particularly the Catholic Church, as the preeminent source of anti-Semitism in the world—ancient, medieval, and modern. While indicting Pius XII as an anti-Semite and a collaborator with Nazi Germany—and ignoring any contradictory evidence—Goldhagen goes on to attribute anti-Semitism to the entire Catholic Church and its leadership, even the present-day Church under John Paul II.

Indeed, the book is so flawed—its facts error-prone, its arguments tendentious, and its conclusion, equating Christianity in its essence with anti-Semitism, both bizarre and dangerous—that most scholars in the field have simply tried to ignore it. *Hitler's Willing Executioners* sold very well and was widely praised in its early reviews. *A Moral Reckoning*, however, has flopped badly, despite a large publicity effort by which the publisher Knopf tried to recoup its advance. More prepared this time, reviewers have also been considerably less kind to Goldhagen, and the reviews have generally run from lukewarm to outraged. In the *Sunday Times*, the British historian Michael Burleigh held his nose long enough to brand the book "vile" and "a strip cartoon view of European history." Despite my fury at Goldhagen's misuse of the Holocaust to advance an anti-Catholic agenda, I had hoped to join the vast conspiracy of silence in which most Holocaust scholars have, delicately and politely, pretended that *A Moral Reckoning* doesn't exist. But the book hasn't quite disappeared with the same speed with which, say, H.G. Wells's 1943 *Crux Ansata: An Indictment of the Roman Catholic Church* fell down the memory hole. Rather, *A Moral Reckoning*—like Paul Blanchard's 1949 diatribe *American Freedom and Catholic Power*—is carving a permanent niche for itself out on the far edges of American culture.

Where Blanchard was a much-reprinted staple for the old anti-Catholic Evangelical world, Goldhagen seems to be turning into a staple for leftists whose hatred of Catholicism derives from the Church's opposition to abortion and the rest of the liberationist agenda. The huge outpouring of books in recent years attacking the wartime pontiff Pius XII—from John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope* to Garry Wills's *Papal Sin*—were bad enough (and Goldhagen, who seems in *A Moral Reckoning* never to have consulted anything except secondary sources, relies heavily upon them). But when Goldhagen extends that attack to the demand that the Catholic Church, as we know it, be abolished as a disgrace and a danger to us all, he establishes a new marker for just how bad it can get—and the maddened anti-Catholics have responded by taking him to their breast, for his diatribe is more vicious and extreme than that of any other recent papal critic.

WITH ALL THAT IN MIND, it is perhaps worth putting on record some of the failings of *A Moral Reckoning*. Indeed, Goldhagen invites the reader to "acknowledge the incontrovertible facts and plain truths contained in this book." It's an invitation he shouldn't have issued. In the June/July 2002 issue of *First Things*, Ronald J. Rychlak published an extensive and damning list of errors in the *New Republic* article—astonishingly few of which Goldhagen has bothered to correct. So, for instance, the establishment of the Jewish ghetto in Rome, one of the tragic milestones in the history of Catholic-Jewish relations, took place in 1556, not in 1555; the Venice ghetto in 1517, not 1516; the Frankfurt ghetto in 1462, not 1460; the Vienna ghetto in 1626, not 1570. It's not that these are particularly important errors, but that they are *simple* errors—easy to look up, easy to check. You can't trust anything Goldhagen reports. He is off by three decades about the beginning of the process for Pius XII's beatification and misidentifies the role of Peter Gumpel (who is not the "advocate" but the independent judge of Pius's cause). He claims that Pius XII neither reproached nor punished Franciscan friar Miroslav Filipovic-Majstorovic, when, actually, the so-called "Brother Satan" was tried, defrocked, and expelled from the Franciscan order before the war ended (and was killed by the Communists shortly after). Then there's the caption that identifies a photo as "Cardinal Michael Faulhaber marches between rows of SA men at a Nazi rally in Munich"—except that the man in the picture isn't Faulhaber but the papal nuncio Cesare Orsenigo, the city isn't Munich but Berlin, and the parade isn't a Nazi rally but a May Day parade. Oh, and the fact that the irascible Faulhaber was a famous opponent of the Nazis. In October, a German court prevented publication of *A Moral Reckoning* until the slander against Faulhaber was corrected.

ON AND ON the factual errors go, the sloppy handling of dates, persons, and places all culminating in the selective use (or ignoring) of evidence to portray Eugenio Pacelli (later Pius XII) as the fount of the era's anti-Semitism. Relying entirely on *Hitler's Pope*, Goldhagen takes what was already an outrageous misreading of a 1919 letter (sent by Pacelli to Rome while serving as papal nuncio in Bavaria) describing a group of Bolshevik revolutionaries who had led an uprising in Munich—which Goldhagen extends to: "The Communist revolutionaries, Pacelli averred in this letter, were 'all' Jews."

The Holy See's 1933 concordat with Germany has long been a key instrument for critics of Pius XII, and indeed there are grounds on which to criticize it. But Goldhagen can't accept mere criticism: "Nazi Germany's first great diplomatic triumph," he has to label it, forgetting that the Four Powers Pact between Germany, France, Italy, and England preceded it, as did League of Nations recognition. Pacelli's concordat "helped to legitimate the Nazi regime in the eyes of the world and consolidate its power at home," Goldhagen insists.

But soon after the concordat was signed, Pacelli wrote two articles in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, unequivocally arguing that the Church had negotiated a treaty and nothing more—a treaty that implied no moral endorsement of Hitler or Nazism. While it's true that Hitler initially thought he would be able to use the concordat to harness the Church, he soon came to regret it—as his frenzied diatribes in his "Table Talk" reveal—precisely because it was being cited by Catholics as a legal basis on which to resist Nazism.

Goldhagen's efforts to portray Pacelli as a man whose whole life was fueled by anti-Semitism are made possible only by his ignoring all evidence to the contrary. Guido Mendes, a prominent Italian physician and Pacelli's lifelong Jewish friend, is never mentioned by Goldhagen. Nor is the fact that when Mendes lost his medical professorship as a result of Fascist anti-Semitism, Pacelli personally intervened on his behalf. With Pacelli's direct assistance, Mendes and his family were able to escape and eventually settle in Israel. Pacelli was instrumental in drafting the Vatican's historic 1916 condemnation of anti-Semitism. Bruno Walter, the brilliant Jewish conductor of the Munich Opera whom Pacelli befriended shortly after arriving in Munich in 1917, recounts that Pacelli helped free Walter's Jewish fellow musician, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, who had been imprisoned during a pogrom. These facts are also never mentioned in Goldhagen's one-sided polemic.

Goldhagen's centerpiece is the outrageous allegation that Pius XII "did not lift a finger to forfend the deportations of the Jews of Rome" or of other parts of Italy "by instructing his priests and nuns to give the hunted Jewish men, women and children sanctuary." Much of this is lifted straight from anti-Pius books like Susan Zuccotti's *Under His Very Windows*—and thus Goldhagen repeats the errors of those books and adds extras, all his own, in his determined attempt to extend their thesis into over-the-top railings against the sheer existence of Catholicism.

GOLDHAGEN IS APPARENTLY UNAWARE (or, more probably, doesn't care) that many distinguished scholars have declared Zuccotti's book "not history but guesswork," as the historian Owen Chadwick put it. Zuccotti's principal charge, mindlessly repeated by Goldhagen, is that there is no credible evidence that Pius XII ever explicitly ordered his subordinates to assist Jews in Italy. In fact, there is a whole body of evidence that proves Pius did. In 1964 Cardinal Paolo Dezza, the wartime rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, published a signed article stating unequivocally that during the German occupation of Rome, Pius XII explicitly told him to help "persecuted Jews" and do so "most willingly." In his 2001 book *Gli ebrei salvati da Pio XII*, Antonio Gaspari compiles additional testimonies. And more recently, Gaspari came across new documents, establishing that as early as 1940 Pius XII explicitly ordered his secretary of state, Luigi Maglione, and Maglione's assistant, Giovanni Battista Montini (the future Paul VI), to send money to Jews protected by the bishop of Campagna.

The Nazi deportations of Italy's Jews began in October 1943. Pope Pius ordered churches and convents throughout Italy to shelter Jews, and in Rome itself 155 convents and monasteries sheltered five thousand Jews throughout the German occupation. Pius himself granted sanctuary within the walls of the Vatican, and his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, to countless homeless Jews. Goldhagen's book conspicuously lacks any discussion of Castel Gandolfo, which enjoys a unique place in the annals of Jewish rescue (and Catholic rescuers) during the Holocaust: In no other site in all of Nazi-occupied Europe were as many Jews saved and sheltered for as long a period. The recently released memoirs of Adolf Eichmann also contain new evidence disproving Goldhagen's claim. The memoirs confirm that Vatican protests played a crucial part in obstructing Nazi intentions for Roman Jews. Eichmann wrote that the Vatican "vigorously protested the arrest of Jews, requesting the interruption of such action." At Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, Israeli attorney general Gideon Hausner said, "the pope himself intervened personally in support of the Jews of Rome." Documents introduced at the trial provide further evidence of Vatican efforts to halt the arrest and deportation of Roman Jews.

No accusation is too preposterous for Goldhagen to accept. Commenting on the Vatican's alleged link to Nazi war criminals, he claims that Alois Hudal, an Austrian prelate and Nazi sympathizer, was "an important Catholic bishop at the Vatican," as well as a "close friend" and "confidant" of Pius XII. Indeed, he adds, both Pius XII and the future Paul VI actively supported Hudal in his criminal assistance to fleeing Nazi war criminals.

As it happens, Alois Hudal was never a bishop "at the Vatican," much less an "important" one, but rather an obscure rector of the *Collegio dell' Anima* in Rome, where he was placed to confine him to a post of little significance. Hudal also was never a "close friend" of Pius XII or Montini. In fact, Hudal's memoirs bitterly attack the Vatican for steadfastly refusing an alliance with Nazi Germany to combat "godless Bolshevism." Far from assisting Nazi war criminals in their escape, Pius XII authorized the American Jesuit Edmund Walsh to submit to the War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg a dossier documenting Nazi war crimes and atrocities. The recent book by David Alvarez, "Spies in the Vatican: Espionage & Intrigue from Napoleon to the Holocaust," shows how much Hitler distrusted and despised Pius XII.

GOLDHAGEN'S VIRULENT *A Moral Reckoning* focuses on Pius XII as the symbol of Catholic evil and repeats almost every accusation, including the most discredited ones, that has ever been leveled against him. But Goldhagen doesn't limit his anti-Catholic diatribe to Pius. Indeed, the point of all the Holocaust material in *A Moral Reckoning* seems to be the concluding pages' attack on John Paul II and the Catholic Church today. Though Goldhagen begrudgingly acknowledges John Paul II's extraordinary efforts to bring Catholics and Jews closer together, he immediately takes this praise back and ultimately contradicts himself entirely by accusing John Paul II of tolerating "anti-Semitic libels and hatreds" during his visit to Syria in the spring of 2001.

Goldhagen claims that "neither John Paul II nor any other Pope has seen fit to make . . . a direct and forceful public statement about Catholics' culpability and the need for all the members of the Church who have sinned during the Holocaust to repent for their many different kinds of offenses and sins against Jews." On the contrary: John Paul II has frequently repented and apologized publicly. In his very first papal audience with Jewish leaders, on March 12, 1979, John Paul II reaffirmed the Second Vatican Council's repudiation of anti-Semitism "as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity," and "which in any case the dignity of the human person alone would suffice to condemn." During his 1986 visit to Rome's chief synagogue—the first time any reigning pope entered a synagogue—John Paul II publicly acknowledged and apologized for the Church's sins. Insisting that there was no theological justification for discrimination, he apologized to the Roman Jews in attendance (many of whom were Holocaust survivors), declaring that the Church condemns anti-Semitism "by anyone—I repeat: by anyone." In 1994, at the personal initiative of John Paul II, the Vatican established diplomatic relations with Israel. In 1998, the Church issued "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," an official document on the Holocaust. And in 2000, the pope made his historic visit to Israel—one of the great legacies of his pontificate, which has done much to further Catholic-Jewish reconciliation.

But Goldhagen can acknowledge none of this. He identifies Christianity itself as the source of anti-Semitism and declares, "the main responsibility for producing the all-time leading Western hatred lies with Christianity. More specifically, with the Catholic Church." The definition of Jews as Christ-killers, claims Goldhagen, goes back to the origins of Christianity. Indeed, it is still central to Catholic thought today, and it has an "obvious integral relationship to the genesis of the Holocaust."

As the Jewish scholar Michael Berenbaum has noted, Goldhagen "omits all mention of the countervailing traditions of tolerance" within Roman Catholic thought, past and present. He also misrepresents the thought of those early Church leaders who advocated a tolerant attitude toward the Jews. Goldhagen's misrepresentation of St. Augustine's views of Jews and Judaism is especially appalling. As Ronald Rychlak has noted, Goldhagen's exposition on St. Augustine "is little more than a crude and contemptuous canard." Similarly, Goldhagen's unsubstantiated claim that "there is no difference in kind between the Church's 'anti-Judaism' and its off-shoot European anti-Semitism" is as unsubtle a statement as someone who claims to be a historian could possibly make.

In short, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's polemic against Pius XII, John Paul II, and the Catholic Church fails to meet even the minimum standards of scholarship. That the book has found its readership out in the fever swamps of anti-Catholicism isn't surprising. But that a mainstream publisher like Knopf would print the thing is an intellectual and publishing scandal.

Rabbi David G. Dalin, a visiting fellow at Princeton University's James Madison Program, is working on a book about Pius XII, John Paul II, and the Jews.

