

# PAPAL TRIP TO HOLY LAND REIGNITES DEBATE ON PIUS XII

Pope John Paul II's historic trip to the Holy Land received very fair coverage by the media. While there were several columnists and TV and radio pundits who made patently unfair comments, most news reports were not tainted with bias. What the trip did, however, was reignite the debate on what Pope Pius XII did during the Holocaust.

One of the most unfair statements on the event came from the online magazine, *Slate*. A writer for the magazine, Jack Shafer, even went so far as to justify anti-Catholicism just days prior to the pope's visit. "If anti-Catholic bigotry exists in America," he said, "it might have something to do with the Catholic Church's past conduct. Just this weekend, His Holiness John Paul II conceded as much when he finally got around to apologizing to the world for 2000 years of Catholic wickedness."

The *New Republic* and the *Nation* also used the papal statement on reconciliation as a club to beat up on the Church. Leon Wieseltier said he could not accept the pope's apology and Katha Pollitt concluded that the papal "apology" was a sign of "how weak" the Church has become. In virtually all the critical commentary on the trip, it was the pope's refusal to condemn Pius XII that disturbed the pundits most of all.

Not given the coverage it deserved were the remarks of the pope at the Holocaust Memorial. Addressing Nazism, the Holy Father asked, "How could man have such utter contempt for man?" He answered, "Because he had reached the point of contempt for God. Only a godless ideology could plan and carry out the extermination of a whole people."

The papal trip to the Holy Land provided the Catholic League

with ample opportunity to defend both Pope John Paul II and Pius XII. In this regard, the media proved to be extremely fair, allowing William Donohue, Robert Lockwood and Patrick Scully a chance to balance some of the more negative commentary.

There is much in this issue on Pope Pius XII. What angered the league about the "60 Minutes" interview with John Cornwell was not simply the angle that program took, but the fact that it came on the day before the Holy Father set foot in the Holy Land.