

THE DEFINITIVE WORK ON PIUS XII

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***Hitler, the War, and the Pope (Revised and Expanded)* by Ronald J. Rychlak. Our Sunday Visitor, 2010.**

University of Mississippi Professor of Law Ronald J. Rychlak published a book ten years ago with the same title as that shown above.

This new book, just published, is presented ten years later as a “revised and expanded” version of the earlier book, and while it definitely is that, this bare description greatly understates the degree to which this new book now covers virtually every aspect of the Pope Pius XII question, and thus has been transformed into what must now be considered the definitive book on the subject. If you have this book, you have everything you might ever need to defend the record and reputation of the World War II head of the Catholic Church.

The earlier edition was already notable for the taking up and dealing with by means of well-documented facts and carefully thought-out arguments the unjustly criticized pontificate of Pope Pius XII and, in particular, in evaluating the pope’s reactions and behavior in the face of the holocaust against the Jews brought about by Hitler and the Nazis. As most people are aware, within about a half dozen years after the death of Pope Pius XII, questions began to be raised and accusations made about the pope’s behavior during World War

II: the pope was allegedly passive and “silent” in the face of Adolph Hitler’s “final solution” to the “Jewish problem”—which consisted, as nearly everybody also knows, in the well-known Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews. Although nobody has ever explained how merely “speaking out” by anybody could ever possibly have stopped the Nazi juggernaut, Pope Pius XII was nevertheless blamed anyway. His failure to “speak out” in the way that the postwar critics who rose up against him thought he should have spoken out meant that for them he had actively *contributed* to the evil wrought by Hitler and the Nazis; he was somehow held to be complicit in Hitler’s “final solution” and hence himself “guilty.”

Once the pope’s “guilt” was established in the public mind in this fashion, what the late Notre Dame Professor Ralph McInerny aptly called the “defamation” of Pius XII, got going in earnest and ballooned into the veritable anti-Pius “industry” that has lasted down to our own time. Book after book and study after study all supposedly established that the wartime pope had been given to cold diplomacy rather than caring concern; that he was perhaps himself anti-Semitic (or at least indifferent to Jewish suffering); that his hatred of Communism blinded him to the evils of Nazism; that his many years of service in Germany as a papal diplomat had made him uncritically pro-German; that he was only concerned with the security of the Church and of Catholics; that he was unduly fearful of retaliation against any action that might be taken by the Church; and that, in the end, perhaps, he was just simply a moral coward.

All of these allegations and others against the pope have now been carefully identified, dissected, and answered in this book by Professor Ronald Rychlak using citations, argumentation, and documentations which in the end are not just irrefutable but are overwhelming. It turns out that there never was any case against Pope Pius XII, none. As the rabbi who contributes a Foreword to this book remarks, the “case” against Pius XII really consisted all along in “lies, slander, malice, and a desire to thwart justice.” Professor Rychlak documents this in relentless detail. He has delved into virtually all of the allegations or suspicions that have been lodged against the pope; he has examined the evidence for them; and has provided the answers which should be persuasive to any fair-minded person. He appears to have read or consulted practically everything that has ever been written about the Pius XII controversy, pro or con.

More than just showing that Pope Pius XII was not silent and guilty in the face of great evil, however, the author shows rather that, on the contrary, he was really a brave and saintly man for whom a “cause” for canonization is currently pending in the Catholic Church based on voluminous testimonials to the heroic virtue of the man from those who actually knew him and worked with him. Although Pope Pius XII was the head of an officially neutral state in the course of the worldwide fighting going on between the Allies and the Axis powers, and hence did not openly favor an allied victory, he also headed up during that same wartime period the Catholic Church’s extensive efforts throughout the war to help victims, refugees, and displaced persons, including Jews. There is abundant documentation throughout this book that the pope and the Church provided enormous assistance specifically to Jews—contrary to allegations still often made and still unfortunately widely believed. Rychlak cites examples of Jews being helped or hidden not just by monasteries, religious houses, or seminaries; he cites examples where Pope Pius XII personally helped Jews.

The book itself consists of eighteen chapters which cover the situation of the papacy going back into the nineteenth century, as well as chronicling the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Germany and Italy following World War I. Several chapters deal with the pontificate of Pope Pius XI in the 1920s and 1930s in the course of which Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, who would be elected pope himself just before the outbreak of the war in 1939, played a vital and significant role. He was, in fact, the architect of many of the policies and action of Pope Pius XI, who, however, never came in for as much criticism as Pius XII did.

The World War II years, as well as the policies, actions, and conduct of Pope Pius XII in the course of them, are covered in a separate chapter for each one of the war years. The pope and his curia did *not* in any way, shape, or form “collaborate” with the Fascists or Nazis, but simply endeavored to survive under what amounted to the very difficult conditions of a wartime occupation by them.

A very important addition to this “revised and expanded” volume is a new chapter entitled “The Play and the KGB Plot,” in which the author goes into the background of the infamous stage play, *The Deputy*, by German playwright Rolf Hochhuth. It was this crude and slanderous play which, in the 1960s, started the ball rolling in the “blame game” against Pius XII. Although Hochhuth claimed that his depiction of the wartime pontiff was based on historical facts, the play was anything but factually based. Rather, it consisted of blatant fabrications which, as Rychlak shows, had originally been concocted and assembled in the Soviet Union in order to discredit the Church. Rolf Hochhuth was either a Communist himself or a dupe. Moreover, the play itself, both in Europe and America, as the author also shows, was produced and largely promoted by known Communists in the theater world of the day.

The defamation of Pius XII, in other words, really *did* start out as a result of a “Communist plot”! Yes, there really was one in this case! The amazing thing is that this myth of a bad pope went so far and lasted so long, considering its true origins. It really has to be considered one of the more successful subversive efforts ever mounted by the Communists.

And the sad fact too, of course, is that this false myth of a silent and guilty and “collaborating” pope has, unfortunately, endured down to our own time in the minds of many people. As is well known, entire books, often well received and touted by today’s elites and the media, have been published bearing titles such as *Hitler’s Pope*, *The Popes Against the Jews*, and *The Silence of Pius XII*.

Professor Rychlak devotes another entire chapter to refuting those he calls “The Critics” of the wartime pope. In this chapter, he very knowledgeably and competently takes on, among others, such anti-Pius authors as John Cornwell, Saul Friedländer, Daniel Joseph Goldhagen, and Susan Zuccotti. It is when he closely examines “the case” mounted against Pius by such authors that he discovers and demonstrates how groundless that case against the pope really turned out to be.

The anti-Pius writers—especially the Catholics among them such as Michael Phayer and Garry Wills, or the ex-Catholics such as James Carroll—really ought to be ashamed of themselves in the light of what the true facts about Pius XII turn out to be. Most of these facts have been there all along. Now that Ronald Rychlak has assembled, organized, and published them, there is no longer any excuse for these critics. One is really hard pressed, in fact, to understand just what the motive had to be for so many to come out blaming and defaming Pius XII in the way that they did. No doubt some people always wanted a convenient scapegoat. It would also seem that the animus of many against Pope Pius XII was really an animus against the Catholic Church. Even then, however, it remains hard to understand how the false myth about him could ever have grown up and persisted the way it has. The appearance of this book ought to herald the end of any further possibility of credibly continuing to maintain the accusations against the wartime pope—but don’t hold your breath!

Of course, other fine writers such as Sister Margherita Marchione, Rabbi David Dalin, William Doino, Jr., Patrick Gallo, Robert A. Graham, S.J., Ralph McInerny, and Michael O’Carroll, among others, including Ronald Rychlak himself in his 2005 book, *Righteous Gentiles: How Pius XII Saved a Half Million Jews from the Nazis*, have all been making the case for a good number of years now against the detractors of Pope Pius XII. Time has been required for all of this material to sink in, but that it will sink in is surely inevitable in the long run since, as the old proverb has it—and as we must hope—“Truth is mighty and shall prevail.” And with this new and definitive edition of *Hitler, the War, and the Pope* by Ronald J. Rychlak we now have between the two covers of one book the evidence that Pope Pius XII, far from being a dupe or a tool of the Nazis, was actually an effective and honorable—and saintly—Vicar of Christ.

The book contains a good Index and Bibliography, as well as photostats of nineteen of the more important key documents. There are also no less than 137 pages of densely packed Notes, which often contain material as interesting and revealing as the main text.

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