



The Pope Pius XII Controversy

A Review-Article

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I.

One of the most remarkable of phenomena in recent years has been the revival of the controversy over the role of Pope Pius XII during the Second World War, and, specifically, over that pontiff's stance with regard to Hitler's effort to exterminate the Jews. First played out over thirty years ago, beginning during the 1960s, the controversy centered on the question of whether Pius XII was culpably "silent" and passive in the face of one of the most monstrous crimes in human history--when his voice as a moral leader and his action as head of the worldwide Catholic Church might possibly have prevented, or at least have seriously hindered--so it is argued--the Nazis in their ghastly plans to implement what they so chillingly called the Final Solution (*Endlösung*) to a long and widely perceived "Jewish Problem" in Europe.

The controversy over Pope Pius XII has not only been rekindled. It has been extended to include other modern popes and, indeed, the Catholic Church herself as "anti-Semitic." An unusual number of books and articles has continued to fuel this controversy. Ten of the most recent books on the subject have been selected for evaluation in this review-article.

As the whole world knows, the Nazis succeeded in murdering some six million Jews in gas chambers, mass shootings, and by other means before their lethal activities were finally halted by the allied victory over Nazi Germany in 1945. The controversy which arose around the wartime role of Pius XII, though, did not arise until nearly two decades later, almost five years after the pope's own death. It was in 1963 that a crude but powerful stage play about the pontiff, *The Deputy*,^[1] became a surprise hit in both Europe and America. Written by a young German playwright, Rolf Hochhuth, the play created a sensation in Berlin and other major European capitals, as it did later in its New York production when it

reached these shores early in 1964.

The title of Rolf Hochhuth's play made reference to the pope as "Christ's deputy"--or "representative." The German title was *Der Stellvertreter*. Catholics do not actually use this term for the pope, of course, but refer to him rather as "the vicar of Christ." Still, the basic idea of the pope as representing Christ came across; and, in the play, this is intended as high irony, since Pius XII is depicted as a cold, heartless, and narrowly scheming man more concerned about the Vatican's position and properties than about the fate of Hitler's victims--more exercised about the allied bombing of Rome than about the murderous atrocities of the Nazis.

The action of the play is principally carried forward by a young Jesuit priest in the Vatican service who learns of the Nazi extermination camps in the East. He is able to bring this information to the attention of the pope himself, but the latter proves unwilling to "speak out" against the gigantic moral evil he has been confronted with. Pius XII is presented as a man "who cannot risk endangering the Holy See...[Besides] only Hitler has the power to save Europe from the Russians."^[ii] Or again: "The chief will not expose himself to danger for the Jews."^[iii]

Hochhuth's thesis about all this was simple: "A deputy of Christ who sees these things and nonetheless lets reasons of state seal his lips...[is] a *criminal*" (emphasis added).^[iv] What the pope should have done was equally clear to the playwright; in the play, the pope is advised to "warn Hitler that you will *compel* five hundred million Catholics to make Christian protest if he goes on with these mass killings" (emphasis added).^[v] How the pope might possibly "compel" anyone to act merely by speaking out is not specified, but it is intriguing to think that Hochhuth, a non-Catholic, even *imagined* that the pope might possess such power. Is it possible that some of the subsequent resentment against Pius XII is similarly based on an erroneous belief that a Roman pontiff somehow does have the power to tell Catholics what to think and to compel them to act, but that Pius XII somehow stubbornly refused to do so in order to help the Jews?

The Deputy presented both real and imagined characters on the stage, and purported to be solidly based on historical documentation. The author even included in the published version an extensive discussion of his sources entitled "Sidelights on History," in which he argued strenuously for his thesis about the culpable silence of Pius XII and concluded that the pope had indeed been a craven fence-sitter. The claimed factual basis for the play, however, did not prevent Hochhuth from including historical distortions which went far beyond any

legitimate dramatic needs, and not a few outright falsehoods, such as presenting Pius XII as ordering Vatican-owned Hungarian railroad stocks to be sold because the Soviets were about to enter Hungary; or as being in direct communication (in confidence) with Adolf Hitler regarding the progress of the war.^[vi] Pius XII never met Hitler in person, nor was he at any time ever in direct contact with him beyond the exchange of diplomatic correspondence.

The level of Rolf Hochhuth's real understanding of the wartime situation may perhaps also be gauged by his assertion that by October, 1943, "there was no longer any reason for the Vatican to still be afraid of Hitler."^[vii] In actual fact, of course, the Germans had just occupied Rome the month before, following the fall of Mussolini and Italy's surrender, and so the possible immediate danger to the headquarters of the Church was greater than ever. The Germans would keep the city in a tight grip for eight more months until it was liberated by the allies on June 4, 1944.

Yet for all of its inaccuracies and even crudities, *The Deputy* was a huge success. It was translated into more than twenty languages and, virtually by itself, launched the original Pius XII controversy. In his review of the play's New York staging, Walter Kerr, then dean of American drama critics, expressed surprise that "so flaccid, monotonous, and unsubtle a play" should have had such an effect. Yet he probably spoke for many average viewers and newspaper readers when he observed that *The Deputy* had nevertheless shocked people "into the realization that a question exists which has not been answered...What were Pius's motives for remaining silent? Were they--could any conceivable combination of motives possibly be--adequate to account for what he did not do?"^[viii]

Thus was posed by a drama critic what almost instantly came to be believed by the public at large to be the essential question as far as the wartime role of Pope Pius XII was concerned. It has pretty much remained the essential question in the public mind ever since. Once the question of why the pope had not spoken out had been effectively posed in such plain and blunt language, that he most certainly *should* have spoken out seemed perfectly obvious to most people; that there might possibly be any valid reasons why he should *not* have spoken out simply seemed counter-intuitive to many, as it apparently did to drama critic Walter Kerr (himself a prominent Catholic, as it happened).

Few probably ever stopped to consider whether there might have been any special circumstances related to wartime conditions or to the Vatican's international position and special history which might have militated against the pope's speaking out. This viewpoint is especially predominant today when we are so accustomed to having a Pope John Paul II constantly speaking out on moral

questions such as war, economic exploitation, bio-technology, legalized abortion, euthanasia, and the like.

The fact that this viewpoint predominates today tends to give the critics of Pius XII somewhat of an advantage, since they are generally able to gain immediate broad acceptance of their assertions about what the pope and the Church should have done during World War II. The defenders of Pius XII, on the other hand, generally have to scramble even to get a public hearing, much less persuade public opinion in their favor; more than that, they are too often apt to be dismissed as mere knee-jerk Catholic apologists.

Almost immediately following the controversy stirred up by *The Deputy*, an extensive controversial literature, both scholarly and popular, about Pope Pius XII and his wartime role grew up. This literature included questions not only about *why* he was silent about the Holocaust against the Jews, but about *whether*, in fact, he was all that silent; about what his policies and actions were with regard to the Jews and other war victims--in other words, what, specifically, did he *do*, if anything, for Jews and other war victims? Other pertinent questions included what his attitudes and aims were towards the Nazis, the Communists, and the Western democracies. Did he, as is still often implied and sometimes even plainly stated, "collaborate" with the Nazis because of his fear of Communism and Soviet expansionism? Finally, what credit or responsibility belonged to the pope for actions taken, or not taken, by Catholics throughout Europe in favor of the Jews?

Still other questions arose as well, some of them predicated on the assumption simply regarded as proven fact that the pope had indeed been culpably silent and passive in the face of the Nazi onslaught: was the pope himself perhaps an anti-Semite? Anti-Semitism was an attitude and prejudice unfortunately deeply rooted in European history, after all, and some Catholics undeniably shared it. Did Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, as papal Secretary of State under Pope Pius XI, pursuing his penchant for diplomatic arrangements between governments, perhaps even help enable the Nazis to seize power in Germany by negotiating the Vatican Concordat that was concluded with Nazi Germany in 1933?

All of these questions (and a few more!) are pretty extensively if not exhaustively covered in the ten books under review here, all of them published within the past four years. Eight of these authors deal specifically with Pius XII (or the Catholic Church), the war, and the Holocaust against the Jews (Blet, Cornwell, Marchione, McNerny, Phayer, Sánchez, and Zuccotti); another one deals more generally with papal attitudes towards and treatment of the Jews which presumably contributed to the eventual perceived failure of Pius XII in World War II (Kertzer); and a final one deals with what the author calls "papal sin" in general,

though he includes a chapter on Pius XII and the Holocaust (Wills).

Five of these authors take a more or less frank anti-Pius (or anti-Church) view (Cornwell, Kertzer, Phayer, Wills, and Zuccotti). Four of them expressly set out to defend the pontiff (Blet, Marchione, McInerney, and Rychlak). One of them declares that his aim is to remain above the fray and simply evaluate some of the arguments, pro and con (Sánchez).

It is perhaps not surprising that the anti-Pius books here should be the ones on the best-seller lists, the ones that have attracted the most public attention. These anti-Pius books too are the ones published by mainstream New York publishers such as Doubleday and Knopf or by university presses, and they are also the ones most likely to be found on public library or bookstore shelves. All four of the pro-Pius books, by contrast, are published by small religious publishers with much less access to bookstore sales and a wide readership. Nor do the pro-Pius books appear to have been reviewed either as widely or as often as the anti-Pius ones; so it seems to be a simple fact that the latter have largely shaped the debate to date. Even so, for reasons that I will try to make clear as I go along, I think the pro-Pius books still have much the better of the argument. Yet in view of the importance of the controversy, all of the books deserve a close look.

What still remains more than a little surprising, though, is that we should have all of these books on this subject more than fifty years after the events they deal with. We might have thought that the Pius XII question would have been thoroughly aired and settled by the plethora of books and articles that appeared on the subject in the 1960s and after, during the initial Pius XII controversy set off by *The Deputy*. Actually, there has all along been a fairly steady trickle of books and articles down through the years from then until now, and thus there now does exist a truly vast literature in a number of languages on Pius XII and the Holocaust, much of it in relatively obscure scholarly journals, though, and thus not always in the forefront of public attention, but nevertheless there. The most recent books, though, have now served to re-ignite the controversy and to attract greater public attention to the Pius XII question once again.

Even so, there is not all that much that is new. Books such as Guenter Lewy's *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*^[ix] and Saul Friedländer's *Pius XII and the Third Reich*^[x] covered much of the essential material available at the time, ending up with negative views about the wartime role of Pius XII, though couched in scholarly terms. In defense of the pope, Pinchas Lapide, an Israeli diplomat, who had been present at the liberation of some of the Jews interned in Italy, and who admired Pope Pius XII, wrote his *The Last Three Popes and the Jews*,^[xi] in part to counter the claims of authors critical of the pope. Similarly,

Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp., in his *Pius XII: Greatness Dishonored: A Documented Study*, [xii] attempted to defend the pope by placing his words and actions in a different perspective than the one taken for granted following *The Deputy*. These and other books and articles, pro and con, have covered almost every imaginable aspect of the subject.

So persistent was the controversy in the 1960s, however, that Pope Paul VI, who as Archbishop G.B. Montini had been one of Pius XII's principal collaborators during the war years--and who himself published a brief defense of Pius XII that appeared in the week following his own election as Pope Paul VI on June 23, 1963 [xiii]--waived the strict time limits (45 years) governing access to the archives of the Vatican Secretariat of State, and assigned three Jesuit historians, a Frenchman, a German, and an Italian, to search the archives and prepare for publication all the documents pertaining to the Vatican's activity during the war. The idea was to provide solid documentation for the role of the pope and the Vatican during that conflict. The three Jesuit historians assigned to this work were later joined by a fourth, the American Jesuit historian, Father Robert A. Graham, S.J., who wrote and published prolifically on the subject in subsequent years.

The results of the intense labors of these four Jesuits, completed in 1981, amounted to twelve volumes published under the title *Actes et Documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre mondiale* ("Acts and Documents of the Holy See relative to the Second World War"; abbreviation ADSS). [xiv] With a narrative written in French, but with the collected Vatican documents retained in their original French, German, Italian, Latin, Spanish, or English, this important collection resembled such commonly consulted collections of documents as, for example, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. In a different climate, the collection might have had the potential to settle many if not most of the questions surrounding Pope Pius XII and his wartime role.

Nothing of the kind ensued, however. Most of the works devoted to or mentioning Pius XII tended to continue along the same anti- or pro-Pius lines as before. The ADSS collection did not seem to be all that prominently consulted or cited anyway--as can even be seen in the bibliographies of some of the books under review here. So disappointed was the Vatican in noting the little effect the ADSS collection seemed to be having that the remaining sole survivor of the original four-Jesuit research team, Father Pierre Blet, S.J., decided to prepare a concise one-volume summary of the contents of most of the ADSS collection; this summary volume was published in 1997 in French and in English translation in 1999; it is one of the books under review here (Blet).

Also in October, 1999, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews reached agreement with the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, an umbrella organization of Jewish groups, to appoint a special International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, consisting of six historians, three Catholic and three Jewish, to examine critically the twelve volumes in the ADSS collection.

This initiative grew out of Vatican disappointment with Jewish reaction to a 1998 Catholic Church statement entitled *We Remember: A Reflection on the "Shoah"* (or "Holocaust").^[xv] The Church had issued this statement as a kind of "apology" for any Church or Catholic sins, whether of omission or commission, against the Jews. The reaction of some Jewish readers, however, proved to be distinctly cool; the Church's attempt at an "apology" did not go nearly far enough, in their view.

For example, the highly respected *Commentary* magazine published a critique of the *We Remember* document by the historian Robert S. Wistrich of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. While agreeing that "one cannot but commend both its tone and its basic aims," Professor Wistrich nevertheless found it "not especially flattering to the Church's declared aspirations." Briefly surveying some of the same questions about the behavior of the pope and the Church during the Holocaust that are covered at greater length in most of the books under review here, he essentially endorsed the anti-Pius viewpoint on most of these questions and faulted the *We Remember* document for attempting to hold that the Church was "blameless during the *Shoah*." He thought a more "honest reckoning with the past" was called for, though his tone remained moderate and civil. Moreover, *Commentary* magazine generously gave considerable space in a subsequent issue to rather extensive rebuttals by Catholic defenders of the pope, among others.^[xvi]

Thus, in spite of the Church's attempt at an "apology," the Pius XII controversy simply seemed to be heating up even more. The appointment of a joint International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission to examine some of the relevant documents seemed a logical next step to help cool it down. The idea seemed to be that a mixed group composed of both Catholic and Jewish scholars, most or all of whom had published studies on the Holocaust, could reach a consensus on at least some aspects of the role which the pope and the Catholic Church had played in the war--a consensus that could then serve to lower some of the decibels in the Pius XII controversy.

One year later, on October 25, 2000, this joint Historical Commission issued a preliminary report, "The Vatican and the Holocaust,"^[xvii] which contained more questions than conclusions, 47 of them to be exact. The report

containing these questions was submitted to Rome with a request for greater access to archival documents. "Scrutiny of these [published] documents does not put to rest significant questions about the role of the Vatican during the Holocaust," the report said. "No serious historian could accept that the published, edited volumes could put us at the end of the story."

Nearly a year after that, in July, 2001, the six Catholic and Jewish historians wrote to Cardinal Walter Kasper, the new head of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (who had asked them for a final report), saying that in order to continue working together they needed "access in some reasonable manner" to the Vatican's unpublished archival material. [\[xviii\]](#) Except for the ADSS volumes produced as a result of Pope Paul VI's special dispensation, of course, the Vatican archives were open to scholars only up to the year 1922. It was explained to the six historians that the archival materials for the war years consists of more than three million pages still uncatalogued; there was no easy--or perhaps even possible--way the historians' request could be granted, at least for the moment.

The six historians were obviously at an impasse with the Church, and, shortly after that, their work was suspended and the group broke up, amid recriminations on all sides. It appeared that Paul VI's hope that opening up the documents to the extent that he did might help settle the controversy, along with the sixteen years of work put in by the four Jesuit historians, had gone for naught.

Father Peter Gumpel, S.J., the *relator* (or "judge") of the cause of Pope Pius XII for sainthood, issued a very sharp statement almost unprecedented for a Vatican official accusing "some--not all--of the Jewish component of the group" with publicly spreading "the suspicion that the Holy See was trying to conceal documents that, in its judgment, would have been compromising. These persons then repeatedly leaked distorted and tendentious news," Father Gumpel charged, "communicating it to the international press." They were, in his view, "culpable of irresponsible behavior." [\[xix\]](#)

Some Jewish leaders, perhaps understandably, responded in kind to this blast. [\[xx\]](#) The joint Catholic-Jewish effort to resolve the Pius XII controversy, or at least lower the decibels, had thus instead only served to *raise* the latter, and for the time being at least, was at an end.

In spite of this disappointment, however, the Vatican announced in February, 2002, that it would soon be releasing Vatican-German relations documents for the years 1922-1939. [\[xxi\]](#) This would seem to represent an effort on the part of the Church to respond to accusations that evidence from the wartime

years was being "concealed."

At the same time that the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations was laboring to set up the joint Catholic-Jewish panel of historians, another and much broader public controversy over Pius XII was just about to break out, one that would no longer be characterized by the civility of the *Commentary* intervention. This major escalation of the controversy began in earnest when *Vanity Fair* magazine, in its issue of October, 1999, published a preview and excerpt from the then forthcoming book of John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*. This, of course, is one of the books under review here, and it attracted a great deal of attention from the very start; it quickly became something of a best seller; it was quite widely reviewed, and, very soon, its author also was out on the talk-show circuit. At one stroke, we were back in the middle of the Pius XII controversy in a manner reminiscent of the days of *The Deputy*. The excerpt from the book published in *Vanity Fair* was typical--and sensational: Long buried Vatican files reveal a new and shocking indictment of World War II's Pope Pius XII: that in the pursuit of absolute power, he helped Hitler destroy German Catholic political opposition, betrayed the Jews of Europe, and sealed a deeply cynical pact with a 20th-century devil.

This sensational introduction in the magazine reflected only too accurately both the tone and content of John Cornwell's book. Supposedly a work of serious history, the book actually lent itself all too easily to the *Vanity Fair* style of treatment. None of the statements just quoted from it above are true, of course:

m There was no previously unknown and "shocking" information about Pope Pius XII found in "long-buried Vatican files"; virtually everything in Cornwell's book had previously appeared in the extensive published literature concerning Pius XII and the wartime period.

m Eugenio Pacelli did *not* "help" Hitler destroy German Catholic political opposition; the Nazis did away with *all* German political parties except their own within months of coming to power.

m Nor did the pope in any way "betray" the Jews. The Concordat which the then Cardinal Pacelli negotiated with the Nazi government was not a "deeply cynical pact," but was the standard kind of agreement the Vatican had negotiated with numerous governments spelling out the legal status and rights of the Catholic Church in their countries.

While the *Vanity Fair* lead-in to Cornwell's book did not come from the

pages of the book itself, the author nevertheless readily accepted this kind of sensational publicity for what he had written. We shall have to look at the book itself in its proper place; but before the book even appeared, the accusations against Pius XII had already been very effectively broadcast by this kind of publicity. The Pius XII controversy was no longer--if it ever had been--merely a debate or dispute among historians or scholars with differing views about the same historical record. It was already, and irretrievably, a public and media event, in which the charges and counter-charges made by the accusers and defenders of the pontiff, respectively, were as likely to appear on a daytime talk show or on the evening news as in a book or periodical reaching a only limited number of people. As we look at the books under review here, we are going to have to remember that they are part of this much broader and on-going public controversy.

Moreover, some of the implications and effects of this broader public controversy themselves go beyond just the words and acts of Pius XII during the war with regard to the Jews. In the course of an excellent review-article in *The Weekly Standard* concerning some of the very same books being reviewed here, for example, Rabbi David G. Dalin noted the striking fact that some of the bitterest attacks on Pius XII have been made by disaffected Catholics. These include, especially, the books by ex-seminarians John Cornwell and Garry Wills reviewed here, as well as another book, not reviewed here, ex-priest James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword*.^[xxii] Rabbi Dalin noted, pertinently, that:

Almost none of the books about Pius XII and the Holocaust is actually about Pius XII and the Holocaust. Their real topic proves to be an intra-Catholic argument about the direction of the Church today, with the Holocaust simply the biggest club available for liberal Catholics to use against traditionalists.^[xxiii]

This is not true of all of the books critical of Pius XII, of course; but it is a prominent and significant and, for some, perhaps surprising, element in the present revived Pius XII controversy. Rabbi Dalin believes it "disparages the testimony of Holocaust survivors and thins out, by spreading to inappropriate figures, the condemnation that belongs to Hitler and the Nazis." He objects to what he calls an "attempt to usurp the Holocaust and use it for partisan purposes."

However, it is not the case that dissident Catholics are the only ones prepared to use the Pius XII controversy for partisan purposes. In yet another lengthy review-article in *The New Republic* of some of the same books under review here (along with some others), Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, author of the very widely noticed 1996 book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*,^[xxiv] launched a generalized attack not only on Pius XII, but on the Catholic Church as a whole as

a thoroughly anti-Semitic institution "at its core."^[xxv] In his earlier book, Goldhagen found it possible to fix collective guilt upon the German people generally for the crimes of Hitler and the Nazis; in his *New Republic* article, he makes the same charge as far as Catholics and the Catholic Church are concerned, charging Christianity and, specifically, the Catholic Church with "the main responsibility" for the anti-Semitism which issued in the Holocaust. Scorning today's usual attempts at polite "ecumenism," which even many critics of Pius XII often still try to maintain, at least in words (and just as the defenders of Pius XII are careful to dissociate themselves from any hint of possible anti-Semitism), Goldhagen bluntly charges the Church with harboring anti-Semitism "as an integral part of its doctrine, its theology, and its liturgy. It did so," he claims, "with the divine justification of the Christian Bible that Jews were 'Christ killers,' minions of the Devil." Noted in his article is an announcement that these claims will be thoroughly elaborated upon by him in a forthcoming book with the title *A Moral Reckoning: The Catholic Church During the Holocaust and Today*. It looks to be quite some book!

But already, at one stroke, with this *New Republic* article, the on-going and already very public controversy over Pius XII has been broadened and extended to include the whole Catholic Church, including the Church *today*. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen is not going to pull any punches, but is going to lay them on. It is more than likely, of course, that this new escalation of the Pius XII controversy will have significant fall-out, perhaps for years to come: it has been launched by a supposedly mainstream political journal, and the book setting it forth will issue from one of America's most prestigious publishers.

Those who hoped for a settlement of the Pius XII question, or at least a moderation of it, are surely going to be disappointed; henceforth we will not only have charges of anti-Semitism bandied about; we may well now have charges of anti-Catholicism as well.

And it should be underlined that Goldhagen apparently bases his attack on Catholics and the Catholic Church very largely on some of the very same books that are under review here: if these books are correct and solidly based, then the Goldhagen thesis should be enhanced accordingly. By the same token, if these books are deficient, then his position would seem to suffer correspondingly.

As encountered in his article, his historical references are so generalized and careless and imprecise--and even inaccurate--while his tone is so overwrought and exaggerated--that one actually hesitates to say how *bad* his article really is; one hesitates for fear of seeming to share in his intemperance! It may even be unfair that some of the books he is supposedly reviewing--and we too are

reviewing--are being made to bear the burden of possible support for his extremism.

In the light of this dramatic escalation of the Pius XII controversy, though, it is doubly important that we look very carefully at the books under review here; the importance of reviewing these particular books could not have been more resoundingly vindicated by this latest development in the controversy over Pius XII and the Holocaust.

Mostly on the basis of the "facts" supposedly established by the books critical of Pius XII utilized by Goldhagen, the publisher of *The New Republic* has felt able to declare to the world at large that Pope Pius XII was simply an "evil man."[\[xxvi\]](#) This kind of denigration of the World War II pontiff is unfortunately not uncommon.

At the same time, in February, 2002, the Berlin International Film Festival gave its prestigious award to a new film, entitled simply *Amen*, by the Greek-born French film director Constantin Costa-Gavras; it is a film about a German SS officer who tells a Catholic priest about the Nazi extermination program going forward in the East; when the priest gets this information to the pope, however, the latter refuses to do anything about it.[\[xxvii\]](#)

This new film is directly based, of course, on Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*. That it has been produced and brought out just at this time, however, makes it one more important element in the revived Pius XII controversy; no doubt the film will spread the received opinion on the culpable papal silence and passivity in the face of gigantic evil even more widely than it has been spread already.

II.

All of the books we are reviewing here on the general topic of Pius XII and the Holocaust deal with pretty much the same set of facts, most of them long on the record in the voluminous Pius XII literature. Contrary to the opinion of the members of the now sadly defunct International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, it is really unlikely that many (or any) startling new revelations will come to light when the Vatican finally opens its archives completely for the war years.

It is difficult to understand, in fact, why this mixed Commission of six historians could not have produced a final report on what the published ADSS collection *does* show about the controversy, recognizing that their conclusions certainly could later be modified by subsequent new evidence; the writing of history, after all, is almost always in need of revision as perspectives change and

as new facts are turned up. At the same time, historians almost always have to depend on "incomplete" sources. To claim that the picture can only be filled in completely when the Vatican finally gets around to divulging what it has allegedly been holding back is neither responsible nor persuasive.

What we have in the ten books under review here is treatment of the same basic body of facts from different perspectives, pro and con. Since the anti-Pius authors believe that the pontiff should have spoken out and acted more vigorously to help the Jews, they naturally tend to concentrate on those instances when he failed to do so, in their view, and to downplay or explain away those instances that might call their thesis into question. As Rabbi David G. Dalin, not unfairly, describes this approach: "It requires...that favorable evidence be read in the worst light and treated to the strictest test, while unfavorable evidence is read in the best light..."[\[xxviii\]](#)

Somewhat the same approach is encountered among the pro-Pius authors: they too understandably try put the best construction possible on the words and actions of Pius XII which support their view, and, where they can, they too tend to downplay those things that tell against their view. Since the point of view of the pope's defenders is predominantly reactive, however, they are generally less likely to downplay or ignore facts and arguments which do not seem to favor their position because they are, after all, precisely engaged in *answering* the charges made against the pope; they have to recognize them in order to answer them.

By and large, the authors on both sides talk past one another. With three exceptions--Ralph McInerny's animadversions on the books by Cornwell and Wills, Ronald Rychlak's "Epilogue" specifically devoted to analyzing critically John Cornwell's book, and José Sánchez's effort to evaluate the literature on the controversy generally--these books were mostly written independently of each other, even though they are generally based on the same set of facts. We therefore need to look at each one individually.

But before we do so, we also need to consider several general questions about the wartime role and situation of Pope Pius XII as these appear to the present reviewer, after having plowed through all of these ten books.

My overall impression is that all of the authors, in one degree or another, are focused so narrowly on the pope and the Jews that they sometimes fail to see and appreciate the larger picture concerning what was going on, namely, that there was a *war* going on! It was a total war too, and one that was being conducted on a worldwide scale; and for those who found themselves inside the territories controlled by the Axis--and this included the Vatican for most of the war--wartime conditions necessarily limited their ability to function in so many different ways

that it cannot be assumed that they were entirely free agents in *any* respect.

As for the pope and the Vatican Secretariat of State, responsible for managing the affairs of a worldwide Church under these difficult conditions--and with a small staff of only about thirty people in all, including clerical help (Sánchez, 44; Zuccotti, 90)--it has to be realized that they at all times and constantly had other and pressing concerns besides just following and reacting to what was happening to the Jews. Indeed, one of the six historians on the defunct joint Catholic-Jewish Commission, Eva Fleischner, whose work judging from mentions in bibliographies has been quite narrowly focused on the Holocaust, was able to observe with refreshing candor in this regard that the ADSS collection revealed to her a Vatican "bombarded on every side about every conceivable human problem. The question of the Jews was there, but was not paramount. In that respect, I understand much better than I did to begin with."[\[xxix\]](#)

Speaking as a former practicing diplomat myself, I sometimes found the apparent expectations of some of these authors concerning what the Church actors in this drama could or should have been doing in the actual situations described to be simply unreal.

Another assumption of most of these authors, especially those in the anti-Pius camp, is that Pius XII was necessarily free in the conditions of war and occupation that obtained to speak out or to make public protests in the way that they think he should have, looking at things from their post-Holocaust perspective. Both before and during the war, the 107-odd acre Vatican City was entirely surrounded by a hostile Fascist regime in Italy, which, not incidentally, also controlled the Vatican's water, electricity, food supply, mail delivery, garbage removal, and, indeed, its very physical accessibility by anybody. John Cornwell admits that Mussolini could have taken over the Vatican at any time (Cornwell, 236)--if sufficiently provoked (or prodded by Hitler). The Italian Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, recorded in his diary in March, 1940, that Mussolini seriously considered "liquidating" the Vatican (Rychlak, 140); for the pope it was not an imaginary threat but an active possibility for most of the war.

From September, 1943, to June, 1944, Rome was under harsh German military occupation, and it was during this period that Hitler seriously considered occupying the Vatican and abducting the pope, as a number of sources attest and as some of our authors do not fail to record (Cornwell, 313-315; Phayer, 100; Rychlak, 264-266; Zuccotti, 315-316). Nor, in the Vatican's experience, was this any imaginary threat, either: both the French Revolution and Napoleon had done precisely that in the cases of Pope Pius VI and Pope Pius VII, having abducted both popes by military force and transported them beyond the Alps (Pius VI died

in exile in France). For the pope there were obviously troubling precedents for what Hitler was reported to be considering--and such reports did come to him. Margherita Marchione describes yet another Nazi plan to attack the Vatican using captured Italian uniforms, a plan which came to light only in 1998, as Milan's *Il Giornale* reported (Marchione, 72-73).

Throughout his tenure as German Ambassador to the Vatican, Ernst von Weizsäcker, "constantly worried that Hitler would order an invasion of the Vatican" (Rychlak, 207). His dealings with the Vatican and his reports back to Berlin reflected that fear. There was never a time before June 4, 1944, when the Allies liberated Rome, that Pius XII and his Vatican colleagues did not have to fear a possible Vatican takeover by armed force.

Nor was this simply a matter of fear for their personal safety. Pius XII more than once gave proof of his personal courage; but he and his colleagues had serious responsibilities at the head of a worldwide Church with members in all the belligerent countries not to put themselves at undue risk if they could help it. As the war progressed, and Adolf Hitler proved himself capable of *anything*, anyone in their situation would have had to weigh carefully at all times just what they could or could not do or say. The idea that Hitler would have *allowed* any effective opposition to his obsessive plans is a very, very large assumption.

Several of our authors even recognize that Fascist or Nazi threats against the Vatican were considerably more than theoretical. "As a demonstration of their power," writes Susan Zuccotti, not otherwise favorable to Pius XII, "they maintained continual harassment. Fascist thugs beat up newspaper vendors of *L'Osservatore Romano* in the streets of Rome in 1940, when the journal was still printing war reports that included news of Italian defeats. The Vatican radio was regularly jammed. Italian and German censors consistently interrupted and read diplomatic communications of the Holy See (Zuccotti, 316; see also Blet, 44; Cornwell, 243-244; Rychlak, 39). Under these circumstances, perhaps the wonder is that the pope was able to say as much as he did during the war.

Another quite unproven assumption that seems to be taken for granted on the anti-Pius side is the notion that *if* the pope had only spoken out, his words would necessarily have been heeded, if not by the Axis governments and their satellites, at least by the Catholic peoples of Europe, who presumably could or would then have opposed what their governments were doing. This assumption seems both unrealistic and unlikely, quite apart from the penalties that citizens in the Axis countries and their satellites would have incurred for opposing their governments.

As for the Axis governments, the Concordats which the Vatican had concluded with both Hitler and Mussolini began to be violated almost as soon as

they were concluded. Ralph McInerny counts no less than 34 notes of protest to the Nazi government that went unheeded between 1933 and 1937; these blatant violations, indeed, were among the things that led up to the encyclical of Pope Pius XI against the Nazis, *Mit Brennender Sorge* ("With Burning Anxiety"), that was issued in the latter year. By 1939, 55 protest notes documenting violations had been lodged with the German government, most of which simply went unanswered (McInerny, 26 & 30). The Vatican had long experience of its protests going unheeded.

By the time the war came, there was a firmly established *pattern* of Axis rejection of Vatican protests; on any given occasion, the pope had to expect that, in all likelihood, his words would *not* be heeded. As the war progressed, this unhappy reality was made quite explicit by the Germans. For example, by June, 1942--after numerous appeals had already been made specifically on behalf of Jews--the Vatican Ambassador to Germany, Cesare Orsenigo, reported to G.B. Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, who had just lodged yet one more appeal on behalf of a Jewish couple, as follows: "I regret that, in addition, I must add that these interventions are not only useless, but they are even badly received; as a result, the authorities show themselves unfavorable to other...cases" (Blet, 148). Perhaps the surprising thing, again, is that the Vatican continued to lodge protests anyway under such conditions.

Another writer, Father Vincent A. Lapomarda, S.J., observes that, according to volumes 6, 8, 9, and 10 of the twelve-volume ADSS collection, the Vatican intervened some 1500 times on behalf of victims of the Nazis. [\[xxx\]](#)

Vatican efforts to influence the Italian government were equally assiduous but usually proved equally futile as long as the Fascists were at the height of their power. In a discussion of Vatican protests against the Italian racial laws in which Susan Zuccotti really seems to be trying to show that the Vatican was only interested in Jews who had converted to Catholicism, she also brings out, no doubt inadvertently, just how little influence Vatican protests really had on the Italian Fascist government. "The answers were almost always negative," Zuccotti writes. "...Mussolini granted no modifications" (Zuccotti, 64-65).

The whole question of special Church emphasis on assistance to Jewish converts to Catholicism, by the way, which the anti-Pius writers generally take as one more piece of evidence that Pius XII had no interest in or concern for the Jews as such, surely needs to be understood in the light of the fact that the Church had a legal right--and responsibility--under the Concordats to plead for these particular victims, whereas the totalitarian governments did not consider or recognize that the Church had *any* standing to intervene on behalf of the Jews. More than that,

the Jewish agencies in the field provided *no* assistance to these Jewish converts to Christianity; the Church was their only possible source of support (Blet, 147; McInerny, 55).

As for the idea that public protests by the pope or the Church might have aroused Europe's Catholic populations to oppose the anti-Jewish measures being carried out by their governments, this idea seems to assume that whenever a pope or a Catholic bishop says something, Catholics will then automatically fall into line to carry out the Church's "orders." This view recalls Rolf Hochhuth's idea that Pius XII could somehow "compel" Catholics to act; it is based on a serious misunderstanding of how Church authority works.

We need only think, for example, of the many strong and repeated statements that Pope John Paul II and the U.S. Catholic bishops have regularly made against legalized abortion in the United States--and then gauge the effect these statements have had on, say, such pro-abortion senators identifying themselves as Catholics as Edward M. Kennedy or John Kerry of Massachusetts; or, for that matter, on the large majorities of Catholic voters in Massachusetts, who put and keep such politicians in office in spite of what the Church teaches.

It is exceedingly naïve to imagine that Catholic prelates can simply issue "orders" to their flocks with the expectation that what they say will be carried out; yet it seems to be a common assumption among many who fault Pius XII for not having issued the proper "orders."

The sad fact is that most German Catholics, like most Germans, especially in the beginning, were attracted to Hitler and the Nazis as the putative saviors of their country. Most Germans had opposed the Versailles Treaty after World War I as unjust to Germany, and most thought Hitler was justified in seeking its revision. As everybody knows, the Nazis came to power by completely legal and constitutional means, and only afterwards dismantled the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic and instituted totalitarian rule. Under their regime, too, Germany went from six million unemployed in 1933 to full employment by the time the war came, [\[xxx1\]](#) and, until Hitler brought ruin on the country *by* making war, many Germans viewed him not too differently from the way the Americans of the same years viewed Franklin D. Roosevelt.

That the Germans should have reacted to the ugly and atrocious crimes that the Nazis began to perpetrate virtually as soon as they gained power is clear enough to us in hindsight; but the fact is that the Germans did not generally so react; they followed Hitler into what became the catastrophe of the war; and it seems quite unrealistic to imagine that anything that the popes might have said or done beyond what they did say and do would under the circumstances have had

much influence on German Catholics in this regard.

Yet Michael Phayer thinks that "because Church authorities left Catholics in moral ambiguity by not speaking out, the great majority remained bystanders" (Phayer, 132). Susan Zuccotti describes Fascist-style Croats engaged in persecuting the Jews as "devout Catholics," presumably ready to take orders from the pope if only he had been willing to issue the orders (Zuccotti, 113). Such views grossly exaggerate both the degree of the Catholic commitment of anybody actually prepared to persecute the Jews in this fashion--*and* the influence any pope or bishops could possibly have had on them, or in a Nazi-ruled Europe generally.

For in that time and place it must also be remembered that there were in force very severe *penalties* for opposing the actions of these totalitarian governments. There were thus a few other reasons besides the pope's failure to speak out that may have persuaded people to be "bystanders." As early as 1936, for example, priests in Germany were already *being arrested* simply for expressing sympathy for Jews and others in concentration camps.^[xxxii] Even before the war, again, "ordinary Germans who were caught with hectographed copies" of Bishop Clemens von Galen's sermons against the Nazi euthanasia program--a celebrated instance where a Churchman *did* strongly speak out--"or who discussed it with colleagues, were arrested and *sent to concentration camps*."^[xxxiii] Speaking generally, those who *criticized* Nazi action against the Jews "*faced imprisonment*"(emphasis added throughout).^[xxxiv]

After the war began, "hostile civilians who...refused to obey a German order were denied any right, and, indeed, could be *killed with impunity* by German soldiers without resort to legal process..."^[xxxv] During the attack on the Soviet Union, the German occupiers warned the Ukrainians: "Should anyone give shelter to a Jew or let him stay overnight, he as well as members of his household will be *shot*"(emphasis added again throughout).^[xxxvi] Merely listening to Vatican radio was a criminal offense in wartime Germany (Rychlak, 149).

Under these circumstances, it is surely remarkable that anybody dared to do or say anything. Certainly it was not the responsibility of the Church or of any spiritual leaders to try to incite their followers to words or actions that would very often have resulted in nothing but a swift and sure martyrdom for them. The Church honors martyrdom but does not demand it of her members. On several occasions Pope Pius XII explained to various interlocutors that he was not speaking out because he did not want to make the situation *worse*. Most historians have tended to dismiss his words in this regard as an unconvincing excuse, but in view of the conditions that obtained in Nazi-occupied Europe for those who lived

there, perhaps the pontiff understood better than his critics what the consequences of public challenges to the Nazis by him might have been. When historians and scholars a half century later write smugly about how Pius XII or the Catholic bishops should have done this, or should have said that, it is hard to credit that they really know what they are talking about, considering the conditions at the time. Yes, the Jews were being killed--but so was almost anybody who effectively tried to stand between them and their killers. Many did so anyway, of course, and heroically; but it was not something that a responsible moral leader could try to oblige them to do.

In short, the idea that Pope Pius XII should--or could!--have simply "spoken out" against the evils of Nazism runs up against some rather inconvenient realities--which some of the present-day writers on the Holocaust seem to have paid too little attention to.

III.

Five major questions need to be addressed and briefly answered before we go on to consider individually each of the ten books under review here:

1) Was Pope Pius XII, in fact, "silent" about the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews?

The basic charge of "silence" on the part of Pope Pius XII, of course, goes back to Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy*, but what too many may have failed to consider is whether there may not have been some very good reasons for what we may call the reticence, or the relative silence, with which the pontiff chose to conduct the Vatican's public policy during the war.

In fact, the "silence" in question *was* only relative, for the pope did speak out, and often eloquently, in a traditional papal way in such documents as his first encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, issued in October, 1939; in his annual Christmas messages broadcast during the war years; and in other addresses and allocutions to various groups, including the College of Cardinals. Many of these pronouncements of the pope received fairly wide publicity and diffusion at the time, given that they came from the pope. More than that, there were Vatican radio broadcasts and articles in the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* which had some impact (when the Fascists or the Nazis were not interfering with *them*).

The encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, for example, addressed two major "errors" that were surely pertinent to the whole wartime situation: 1) The "law of human solidarity and charity which is dictated and imposed by our common origin and by the equality of the rational nature in all men, to whatever people they

belong"; and 2) the divorce of civil authority from "every restraint of a Higher Law derived from God," thus leading to the false worship of race and state. [\[xxxvii\]](#)

This encyclical certainly did attempt to deal with the problems then confronting the world in the way that the popes had traditionally dealt with such things, that is, by applying the Church's teachings to them. One of the major problems with such statements in the minds of those susceptible to a Rolf Hochhuth kind of thinking, though, is that they are written in "Vaticanese": they consist of broad and general statements couched in a rather mannered and elaborate style. In the view of papal critics, then and now, they fail to come to grips with a gigantic contemporary evils such as Nazism. Still, they cannot be equated with "silence."

Nevertheless, if by "silence" is meant that Pope Pius XII did not denounce the Nazis and the Fascists by name, and did not, in particular, detail their manifold crimes, including those against the Jews, then it is true that the pope deliberately held back from following a course which he believed would have no effect and, worse, could incite the Nazis to further crimes and violence. This approach was not just something that Pius XII had decided on his own; it represented long-standing Vatican policy; it rested on the Church's belief that in conflicts where Catholics are to be found on both sides, the head of the Church is obliged to be neutral.

Neutrality is especially important for the Vatican because in any war, it also sees its role primarily as that of a peace-maker. Pope Pius XII issued his five-point peace plan shortly after his election to the papacy, just as Pope Benedict XV had issued his five-point peace plan during World War I. This was one of the ways the popes believed it was appropriate to speak out. Pope Pius's belief never wavered throughout the war that, as he said in his stirring address on the eve of the conflict: "Nothing is lost with peace; all may be lost with war." [\[xxxviii\]](#)

Nor was there ever a time, before or during the war, when the pope did not hope to help mediate an armistice or peace settlement among the warring countries. In order to be able to play this role, however, the pope was convinced that he had to maintain a strict Vatican neutrality. If he did not denounce Nazi Germany directly and by name, then neither did he, for example, denounce Soviet Russia directly and by name. Yet while Catholic Poland was being swallowed up by Hitler, the eastern part of Poland and Catholic Lithuania as well were being swallowed up by Stalin. In the period 1939-41, according to the distinguished historian Norman Davies, "the Soviets...were killing and deporting considerably more people than the Nazis were..." [\[xxxix\]](#)

If Pius XII did not publicly and specifically condemn the Nazi death camps after learning about them, he also did not publicly and specifically condemn the allied bombing of cities. Though historians of the Holocaust rarely advert to it, the killing of the innocent in this way is as contrary to Catholic moral teaching as the killing of the innocent in the camps. Millions perished in the war, of course, just as millions perished in the camps; approximately 40,000 people were killed, for example, in a single allied bombing of Hamburg in July, 1943, no part of which was aimed at any military target. [\[xi\]](#)

In the midst of this generalized slaughter, since the pope disposed of no material means, and since the governments on all sides intent upon the pursuit of the war were more or less deaf to the entreaties he did from time to time make, the Vatican at least tried to do what it could do to ameliorate the situation. In this effort, diplomacy was the Vatican's primary chosen means, not only in dealing with belligerent governments but also in attempting to help victims of the war, including Jews. Pius XII has been strongly criticized for preferring to use the means of diplomacy rather than plainly denouncing gross evil. Michael Phayer sees what he calls the pope's "attempt to use a diplomatic remedy for a moral outrage" as Pope Pius XII's "greatest failure" (Phayer, *xii*). Yet the pope was not following a policy that was original to himself; it was the traditional policy of the Vatican.

During World War I, for example, Pope Benedict XV did not condemn Germany by name in the case of German atrocities in Belgium. He was accordingly denounced by the allies for his "silence." There was even a pamphlet published against him in 1916 entitled "The Silence of Benedict XV." [\[xli\]](#)

Similarly, Benedict XV did not "speak out" against the twentieth century's first notorious example of genocide--the massacre of over a million Armenians by the Turks in 1915. Rather, the pope made a strong diplomatic protest through his apostolic delegate in Istanbul; he also sent similar notes to the belligerent governments of Germany and Austria-Hungary, as well as to the Sultan of Turkey in Istanbul. [\[xlii\]](#)

Those who think that this consistent Vatican policy of strict neutrality in wartime was inadequate, considering the evils of the time, have a point; but they also need to remember the nature and the precariousness of the Vatican's own position in the world. Following the conquest of the former papal states (1860), and of the city of Rome (1870), by the newly unified Kingdom of Italy, the Vatican had *no* international status; the popes were "prisoners in the Vatican," entirely at the mercy of generally hostile Italian anti-clerical governments. Only with the conclusion of the Lateran Pacts in 1929, was the sovereignty of the Holy

See over its minuscule Vatican territory recognized by an international treaty.

Article 24 of the Vatican Concordat with Italy (a component of the Lateran Pacts) declared Vatican City to be neutral and inviolable territory; at the same time, the Holy See had to promise to remain "extraneous to all temporal disputes between states."[\[xliii\]](#) In other words, the Vatican was *required* to be strictly neutral by its own foundational document as an independent state. The policy was no mere whim or desire or personal policy of Pius XII, although he took it with the utmost seriousness and was determined to maintain it. The idea that he should somehow have abandoned Vatican neutrality in view of the special evil of the Nazi regime entails, of course, an acceptance of the further idea that solemn international covenants can be unilaterally abrogated at the option of one party--hardly an idea with which to oppose the lawlessness of Hitler. Moreover, abandonment by the Vatican of its own neutrality would have provided Hitler or Mussolini with a justification in international law for taking over the Vatican.

There were other reasons why Pius XII chose to follow the course that he did. He was pressured for his "silence" by both Axis and Allies, for example, from the earliest days of the war. More than once he stated (as we have already noted) that he was not speaking out in order not to make the situation worse for the victims. At one point, though, he did stretch Vatican neutrality to the limit by expressing his condolences to the rulers of just-invaded Belgium and the Netherlands; he was then promptly castigated by the Allies for not condemning Germany more explicitly, and by Germany and Italy for violating Vatican neutrality (this was one of the occasions when Mussolini had *L'Osservatore Romano* confiscated and its distributors beaten up).

In answer to a formal diplomatic protest lodged by the Italian Ambassador to the Vatican, the pope said:

The Italians are certainly well aware of the terrible things taking place in Poland. We might have an obligation to utter fiery words against such things; yet all that is holding Us back from doing so is the knowledge that if We should speak, we would simply worsen the predicament of these unfortunate people (Blet, 45).

Here the pope was not talking about possibly making things worse just for Jewish victims. At this point in time (May, 1940), it was Catholic Poles who were also being indiscriminately slaughtered in great numbers. As one historian later wrote: "...on the average, three thousand Poles died each day during the occupation [of Poland], half of them Christian Poles, half of them Jews..."[\[xliv\]](#)

The pope and his associates repeated on various occasions this same

justification for not speaking out. In February, 1941, for example, the pope again commented that silence was "unhappily imposed on him" (Blet, 64). This was no mere excuse. At the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals after the war, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring testified that Pius XII no doubt did not protest "because he told himself quite rightly: 'If I protest, Hitler will be driven to madness; not only will that not help the Jews, but we must expect that they will then be killed all the more'" (Rychlak, 261).

Similarly, Dr. Marcus Melchoir, the Chief Rabbi of Denmark, who was himself rescued with his entire community by unpublicized efforts, expressed the same opinion after the war: "I believe it is an error to think that Pius XII could have had any influence whatever on the brain of a madman. If the pope had spoken out, Hitler would probably have massacred more than six million Jews and perhaps ten times the number of Catholics" (McInerny, 140).

The best known case of how publicly challenging the Nazis in occupied Europe could indeed make things worse, of course, is the case of the Dutch bishops. Their public protest, in July, 1942, against the persecutions being carried out by the Nazis resulted in the immediate revocation of what had been an exemption in favor of baptized Jews; and in the immediate deportation to Auschwitz and execution of all the Catholic Jewish converts, including the philosopher and Carmelite nun Edith Stein, later canonized by the Church. Jewish converts to Protestantism were not taken at this time because their leaders had agreed not to protest publicly.

All of our authors except David Kertzer record the Dutch incident (Blet, 147-148; Cornwell, 286-287; Marchione, 20 & 28; McInerny, 84-85; Phayer, 54-55; Wills, 54-56; and Zuccotti, 312-313); José Sánchez touches on it only fleetingly, but seems to accept that the public protest of the Dutch bishops "led directly to the deportation and killing of Jews who had converted to Catholicism" (Sánchez, 133).

The anti-Pius authors are not so sure. John Cornwell accepts the basic facts but then launches into a discussion of how the incident has been used as the basis of "exculpatory statements" for Pius XII; he particularly objects to one by the pope's long-time housekeeper, Sister M. Pasqualina Lehnert, who, many years later, reported that the pope had actually proceeded to destroy a protest document he had drafted against the Nazi persecutions when he learned of this incident concerning the Dutch bishops.

Michael Phayer is even more skeptical than Cornwell about this story, using the incident to question the credibility of Sister Pasqualina. Garry Wills cites the story in order to question the legitimacy of the canonization of Edith Stein as, properly speaking, a Catholic martyr (and not just another Jewish

victim). Susan Zuccotti cites the story mostly as related to her primary subject, the Holocaust in Italy, but finally concedes that "the pope was probably correct that some Jews involved with Catholicism, as well as some Catholics, would suffer from a public protest"--she does *not* concede that a papal protest might have made things worse for the Jews as such, since her primary thesis is that many more Jews suffered and were sacrificed than necessary *because* the pope never found a way to speak out against the Nazis.

The pro-Pius authors take the opposite viewpoint; they are all convinced that the incident strongly vindicates the Vatican's policy. Pierre Blet records that the Vatican had actually been expecting a much better outcome in Holland based on diplomatic reports it had received; and was surprised and dismayed by the deportations (which would seem to indicate that the Nazis did change their policy abruptly). Margherita Marchione strongly deplores the protests later raised against the Church's beatification of Edith Stein as a result of her deportation and death. Ralph McInerny speaks of the "the tragic consequences of open confrontation" and reports the actual words of the Nazi *Reichskommissar* reacting to the public protest of the Dutch bishops: "If the Catholic clergy does not bother to negotiate with us, we are compelled to consider all Catholics of Jewish blood as our worst enemies, and must consequently deport them to the East." Ronald Rychlak points out that the *Reichskommissar* in question expressly stated that the Catholic bishops had "interfered," and *therefore* the deportations had to be carried out.

The particular interpretation of each of our various authors of this particular incident is typical of their treatment of Pius XII and the Holocaust generally: the same set of facts is made to serve each author's position, whether for or against the pope.

Still, nothing related to this incident suggests that there were *not* serious consequences or penalties for speaking out against the Nazis or trying to pressure them. On the contrary, it seems that even the anti-Pius authors basically have to concede this in this case--while, in the case of a couple of them, fuzzing the whole thing up by then diverting attention to the credibility or lack of it of Sister Pasqualina.

Other examples of the same kind can be cited, however. In Hungary in 1944, for example, in a liberated Rome when Pius XII and his nuncios were in a better position to speak and act more forcibly and were quite vigorously doing so--and with some success in preventing further deportations of Jews--the Germans responded by overthrowing the Hungarian government and installing a new and more violent one willing to proceed against the Jews. [\[xlv\]](#) That resistance to the Nazis often did make things more difficult for the victims was an established

pattern in Nazi-occupied Europe. Pius XII was not merely rationalizing his decision not to speak out forcefully by saying it made things worse; he was referring to a reality that was obvious to those coping at the time with the war and the evils it had brought in its train.

And there were yet other reasons for the course of action which Pius XII followed. No better summary of them probably exists than that of J. Derek Holmes in his book *The Papacy in the Modern World*:

[Pius XII] was very skeptical, probably rightly, about the influence of public denunciations on totalitarian regimes. Such condemnations were not only useless, but might even provoke retaliation.

Pius XII was certainly concerned to safeguard German Catholicism from the threat of National Socialism and might even have been afraid of losing the loyalty of German Catholics. He was also anxious to avoid jeopardizing the position of Catholics in Germany and in the occupied territories. Judging from the pope's correspondence with the German bishops, fears of reprisals would seem to have dominated his attitude towards the fate of the Jews in Germany. The very evil to be condemned was sufficiently evil to be able to prevent its condemnation. But the pope had to struggle hard to maintain his "neutrality." He was certainly well-informed and there is a suggestion of total helplessness in his letters in the face of such incredible evil. Even if he made the wrong decision in keeping "silent," he cannot be accused of taking the decision lightly. Finally, the pope's own work on behalf of the Jews might have been endangered by a public denunciation of the Nazis, even though such a denunciation might have justified his moral reputation in the eyes of mankind. [\[xlvi\]](#)

These, then, were some of the reasons why Pius XII decided upon the *relative* silence he maintained in the face of the Holocaust. He was far from totally silent, as we have seen, even as through the organs of the Church he worked to help the Jews and other victims.

As for the effect of some of the statements that he did make during the war years, one researcher, Stephen M. DiGiovanni, had the idea of going directly to the *New York Times*, available on microfilm in most large libraries, to see what America's newspaper of record had to say about Pius XII as events in wartime Europe unfolded. The results of his inquiry, available on the website of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, [\[xlvii\]](#) cast considerable doubt on

the allegations, still being repeated more than a half century later, that Pius's statements were too few, too muted, and too indirect ever to enable the public understand what was happening in Europe under the Nazis.

It is true that many historians sniff at mere newspaper article research, preferring no doubt to burrow in the archives. Still, it is hard to credit the overall thesis of the pope's culpable silence when we come upon such *New York Times* headlines as these: POPE CONDEMNS DICTATORS, TREATY VIOLATORS, RACISM (October 28, 1939); or, POPE IS EMPHATIC ABOUT JUST PEACE...JEWS' RIGHTS DEFENDED (March 14, 1940); or when we come upon *Times* editorials such as those commenting on the pontiff's 1941 and 1942 Christmas Messages where the pope is described as "a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent."

2) What did Pius XII do for the Jews and could he possibly have done more?

It is surely something of a truism to say that historical figures could have "done more" or acted differently, but it is also beside the point. The proper task of history, it would seem, is to understand what someone did and why. When a Pius XII is instead charged with "silence," it is very hard to deal with the question; it is like an unprovable negative.

Actually, Pius XII and the Vatican were heavily involved in relief work throughout the war, quite apart from what the pope said, or did not say; on the "silence" question, Margherita Marchione, among other authors, points out that other agencies involved in relief work were similarly "silent." She notes that the World Council of Churches, for example, left any possible denunciations of crimes to its member churches--just as the Holy See regularly left it to the Catholic bishops to say whatever seemed necessary or helpful.

Similarly, the International Red Cross, according to Marchione, began drafting a protest statement against the Nazis in 1942. It was never issued, however (Marchione, 174-175). In February, 1943, at a meeting called to examine the problem of helping Jews threatened by the Nazis--a meeting which included the papal nuncio as well as a pastor from the World Council of Churches--the Red Cross articulated its reasons for deciding not to issue any protest statement; protests, in the view of the Red Cross, would jeopardize the relief work the agency was carrying out in favor of war victims:

Such protests gain nothing; furthermore, they can greatly harm those whom they intend to aid. Finally, the primary concern of the International [Red Cross] Committee should be for those for whom it was established (Blet, 162).

That this was the considered view of the Red Cross reveals a great deal

about how the situation was viewed at the time. Yet I do not recall that a single one of the anti-Pius books--nor do the indexes of any of them reveal--any mention of the fact that the Red Cross, like the Vatican, was attempting to carry on doing what it could do in the way of relief without issuing direct challenges to regimes which exercised iron control in the very territories where most of the victims in need of assistance were located. José Sánchez does mention this "silence" of the Red Cross, but goes on to say that, in his view, more was expected of the pope as "the moral voice of Catholicism" (Sánchez, 120).

In this connection, people have often asked why Pius XII did not excommunicate Hitler, a baptized Catholic, along with those Catholics who participated in the Nazi killings. Our authors generally do not dwell on this question, perhaps considering themselves to be at a level of sophistication above asking such a question. Certainly any such excommunications would have constituted a provocation, if that was what the pope, like the Red Cross, was trying to avoid.

More than that, though, while excommunication might have been effective back in the ages of faith, when a head of state had to contend with strong feelings about excommunication on the part of his subjects, in today's secularized world it was not likely to have much effect. The Holy See, moreover, had first-hand experience of how ineffective excommunications had been for a very long time: the excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I had certainly not helped the Church in England; nor did it deter Napoleon. In more recent times, the pope had without any discernible effect whatsoever excommunicated the Savoy ruler who became King Vittorio Emanuele I of a United Italy, along with his famous Prime Minister Count Camillo Cavour. The excommunications of both of these men then simply had to be quietly lifted to enable them to receive the last Sacraments of the Church at the time of their deaths. [\[xlvi\]](#)

More than that, Hitler had long since "excommunicated" himself; he had not practiced the Catholic faith since childhood, and on numerous occasions had expressed his hatred of it (Rychlak, 272-273). Nor does it seem that those who proved themselves capable of engaging in the Nazi killings could have been much influenced by being told that they had been excommunicated. Excommunication would have amounted to an ineffective gesture (like speaking out). More important for the pope would be what could effectively be done under the circumstances.

So what did the Vatican do for war victims, including the Jews? Pope Pius XII set up both a Pontifical Relief Commission and a Vatican Information Service; the former was designed to provide aid in the form of whatever funds, goods,

medicine, or shelter could be obtained and distributed, while the latter aimed to find and report on missing soldiers or civilians who had become separated because of the war. Headquartered at the Vatican, these organizations raised money, for example, in the Americas, and then worked through Church institutions and personnel at all levels to funnel aid to needy victims. Thousands of people were involved in this work: priests, monks, friars, nuns, lay volunteers, military chaplains, and others. The networks established by and through these organizations would also prove to be instrumental in hiding Jews or helping them to escape.

From the outset Pope Pius insisted: "It is our ardent wish to offer to the unfortunate and innocent victims every possible spiritual and material succor--with no questions asked, no discrimination, and no strings attached."[\[xlix\]](#)

In other words, the assistance specifically provided by the pope and the Church to the Jews was rendered to them along with the aid provided to other wartime victims. It was the Church's policy, as well as the Church's boast, that whatever assistance she could give would be given impartially. Ralph McInerny observes that because the Church was engaged in defense of the "the common rights of the innocent, there was no need to make special mention of the Jews. The Church must come to their defense as to that of any other innocent victims"--he also notes, though, that "Pius XII did make special mention of the Jews" anyway (McInerny, 59).

Since so much is commonly made about what Pius XII did *not* do for the Jews, there is obviously a great misunderstanding at work here. While the Church saw herself as attempting to provide help indiscriminately to all, including the Jews, most of the anti-Pius writers see the pope's "failure" to single out the Jews for mention more often and more specifically than he did as *proof* of his alleged small concern for the Jews and their unique problems, if not as actual anti-Semitism on his part (Cornwell, 296-297; Phayer, 41 & 110; Wills, 66-67; Zuccotti 1-2 and *passim*). David Kertzer even declares that "as millions of Jews were being murdered, Pius XII could never bring himself to publicly utter the word 'Jew'" (Kertzer, 16).

Kertzer, of course, is mistaken about this, but his very exaggeration indicates the depth of the emotion invested in this question by some of our authors. This raises a further question, though, of why the anti-Pius authors generally give so little attention to the actual wartime and relief and rescue efforts that the Church did carry out, however inadequate they may have been in comparison with the enormity of the Holocaust against the Jews. These efforts are pretty consistently downplayed or even ignored by most of the anti-Pius authors,

even while they go on at length about the inaction of Pius XII and his supposed negative attitudes towards the Jews.

On the other hand, all of the pro-Pius authors strongly emphasize the Church's wartime relief efforts. All of them quote the estimate of Israeli diplomat and pro-Pius author Pinchas Lapide that "the Catholic Church, under the pontificate of Pius XII, was instrumental in saving at least 700,000, but probably as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands" (Blet, 286; Marchione, 2 & 50; McInerney, 168-169; Rychlak, 240 & 404).

José Sánchez also quotes the same passage but then calls it "undocumented" and says the "uncritical acceptance of Lapide's statistics and statements has weakened [the] arguments" of the pope's defenders (Sánchez, 140). Yet Sánchez himself has little more to say at all about what the pope and the Church did, in fact, do in a positive way to help the Jews; and, in this respect, his book resembles the books of the anti-Pius authors.

The anti-Pius authors themselves, however, with the exception of Susan Zuccotti, ignore Lapide's statistics completely, not merely as inaccurate, but as if they did not even exist. Relying on the these authors alone, it would be hard learn that Pius XII did anything or helped anybody, and this represents a serious failure on the part of these authors to deal with all the facts of the case.

Susan Zuccotti represents a special case here (as, to a lesser extent, so does Michael Phayer), since she does cover many instances of Jews being helped by Catholics and Church institutions and personnel. But her concern is almost invariably to show that they received such aid apart from--and perhaps even in spite of--anything that Pius XII may ever have said or done. She even mentions Lapide several times, only to charge his work with "being replete with egregious mistakes and distortions" (of which she actually cites only two misattributions in newspaper articles). She goes on to characterize Lapide's methodology as "flawed and the results unreliable" (Zuccotti, 303-4, 336n11, 337n20, 394n7). She does not document or show this, however, but merely asserts it.

So what is the case, then? Did the pope, or the Church under his leadership, help or save any Jews in their hour of need, or not? If so, how much help? How many Jews were hidden or saved? If Lapide's frequently quoted figure is so "flawed," then what were the numbers, approximately, if any numbers are obtainable at all? There is certainly plenty of anecdotal evidence of Jews being aided. Should not these questions at least be *addressed* by those trying to make the case against Pius XII, even if wholly accurate answers might understandably be difficult to come by?

Alas, these questions are basically *not* addressed by the anti-Pius authors. Unless and until they are addressed their case against the pope can hardly be

considered made. If the pope who is accused of being culpably silent and passive in the face of the Holocaust was, in fact, quite active in helping the Jews--just as he was far from entirely silent as well!--how are the charges going to hold up? What is the Pius XII controversy all about?

As Robert P. Lockwood points out in a well-documented and judicious "white paper" on Pius XII available on the website of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, even if Pinchas Lapide's figures represent "an exaggeration by half, it would [still] record more Jewish lives saved than by any other entity at the time."[\[1\]](#)

3) What was the attitude of Pope Pius XII towards the Nazis, the Communists, and the Democracies? Did he favor or collaborate with the Nazis?

Archbishop Eugenio Pacelli, who later became Pope Pius XII, spent many years as papal nuncio in Germany, spoke fluent German, and was very sympathetic to Germans and German culture. Throughout his pontificate in Rome, his private secretary and closest confidante was a German Jesuit, Father Robert Leiber, S.J., while the papal household was managed by a German nun, Sister Pasqualina Lehnert. The pope was obviously very comfortable in a "German" environment, even within the Vatican walls.

Many have taken these pro-German proclivities of the pope, combined with his well-known abhorrence of Communism, as proof that Pius XII favored a German victory in the war with the Soviet Union, and that he even saw Nazi Germany as some kind of "bulwark" against Communism. This was one of the principal themes of Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*. In their starkest form, these accusations are no longer directly lodged against the pope--but they continue to be strongly implied in the anti-Pius literature.

Citing historians who have made use of the volumes of the ADSS collection, José Sánchez says that the notion that Pius was pro-German in the war cannot be supported (Sánchez, 106). Pierre Blet points out that Pius XII's consistent position calling for a negotiated peace in no way changed when Hitler launched his attack against the Soviet Union. "Pius never spoke, even by means of allusion about a 'crusade' or a 'holy war' against Bolshevism. His work on behalf of peace after June, 1941, was in no way different from what he did previously" (Blet, 63).

Although the Third Reich was pretending to lead a "crusade" against Bolshevism, from the very first days of the war it had in fact been carrying out a relentless persecution against the Catholic Church and Polish Christians; this

persecution was greatly intensified when German forces entered the Soviet Union. In those days, it was the Axis the "silence" of Pius XII grated upon. Mussolini, through his ambassador to the Vatican, tried hard to get the pope to endorse the Axis "crusade" against Godless Communism. The ambassador stated that "the silence of the pope has been a thorn in the heart of Mussolini"!

Pius XII's collaborator in the Vatican Secretariat of State, Archbishop Domenico Tardini, speaking for the pontiff, told this same ambassador: "I should be only too pleased to see Communism disappear from the face of the earth. It is the Church's worst enemy. But it is not the only one. Nazism has conducted and still conducts a violent persecution of the Church...the Church can hardly regard the *Hakenkreuz* [Swastika] as...the symbol of a crusade!"^[li]

Among the authors covered here, John Cornwell still tries hard to perpetuate the myth of a pro-German Pius, and he even describes the Concordat concluded by the Vatican with Nazi Germany as delivering "the powerful institution of the Catholic Church in Germany into the hands of Hitler" (Cornwell, 85); but then Cornwell is trying to show, precisely, that Pius XII was "Hitler's pope," a characterization that the record does not support. Although the Vatican, like the rest of Europe at the height of Hitler's power, was obliged to accommodate itself in various ways to what seemed to be shaping up as a very long rule by a victorious totalitarian Germany, at no time was the Vatican's official neutrality (or, as Pius XII preferred to call it, "impartiality") ever seriously compromised. There was never the slightest question of any "collaboration."

Moreover, Pius XII, both before and after his accession to the papacy, made many statements strongly critical of Nazism (in addition to the strictures against statism and racism found in his official Church teaching documents). Ronald Rychlak notes that "of the forty-four public speeches that Nuncio Pacelli made on German soil between 1917 and 1929, at least forty contained attacks on National Socialism or Hitler's doctrines" (Rychlak, 18). The Berlin *Morgenpost* of March 3, 1939, greeted the election of Cardinal Pacelli to the papal chair as "not accepted with favor in Germany because he was always opposed to Nazism."^[lii]

The Germans pointedly sent no delegation to the coronation of Pius XII--a notable diplomatic snub.^[liii] Joseph Goebbels called the pope "the deputy of the Jew God" (McInerny, 158). Mussolini called him "a renegade Italian who has sided with the enemies of his country" (Rychlak, 228).

To various interlocutors Pope Pius XII made a number of extremely critical statements about the Nazis; if these were not known during the war to the public at large, they certainly should be known to historians examining the record today, and should exclude any suggestion of Pius favoring the Nazis. Typical of

such statements was the pope's remark to the rector of the Gregorian University in December, 1942: The Nazis "want to destroy the Church and crush it like a toad...There will be no place for the pope in the new Europe."^[liv] As early as 1933, Cardinal Pacelli had voiced his strong misgivings about the Nazis to the British Chargé d'Affaires to the Holy See, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, who reported to London that "Cardinal Pacelli deplored the action of the German government at home, their persecution of the Jews, their proceedings against political opponents [and] the reign of terror to which the whole nation has been subjected" (Rychlak, 49).

If the record shows, then, that Pius XII was not even remotely pro-Nazi, or pro-German in the war--or a "collaborator," even indirectly--the pope's anti-Communism, on the other hand, was well known, and was a notable feature of his pontificate. In this regard, and in the light of the Cold War that followed World War II, Pius XII proved to be more prescient than some of the other prominent leaders of the day. But his anti-Communism did not dispose him towards the Nazis: he considered Soviet Communism a *greater* long-term evil than Nazism, but he thought that the latter constituted a more *immediate* evil.^[lv]

As Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pacelli had been instrumental in the preparation and issuance of the papal encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, in which his predecessor, Pope Pius XI had declared that "Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatever."^[lvi] Issued just five days after the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* ("With Burning Anxiety"), in which Pius XI had so sternly condemned Nazism for its idolization of race and state, and its "war of extermination" against the Church,^[lvii] this anti-Communist encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* effectively demonstrated the Vatican's wish to condemn both totalitarian systems together. The Church did not dispose of any armed force to "fight" either system, of course, but at least the issuance of these two encyclicals only a few days apart unmistakably showed where the Church stood. Cardinal Pacelli played a major role in the production of both documents; and the record therefore shows that he opposed both Nazism and Communism.

Writers such as John Cornwell who dwell on Cardinal Pacelli's earlier role in negotiating the Vatican Concordat with Germany try to imply that the Vatican would never have concluded such an agreement with the Soviet Union; they are quite wrong about this, however, since it was none other than the young Eugenio Pacelli himself who tried (but failed) to negotiate a Concordat regularizing the Church's status in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.^[lviii] Cornwell actually

mentions this but interprets it as providing one more example of how Pius XII was hardened in his conviction of "the impossibility of striking deals with Bolshevism" (Cornwell, 263).

In spite of his pronounced anti-Communism, though, and of the official neutrality he was determined to maintain, Pius XII nevertheless certainly favored an allied victory in the war. This was brought out quite clearly in the way the pope resolved in favor of the allies a question that raged in the United States regarding lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union. Since Pius XI had so clearly condemned Communism as "intrinsically evil," many American Catholics could not see how there could be any "cooperation" with such an evil regime, since this would go against the express words of the late pope.

To resolve this dilemma, President Roosevelt sent his personal representative Myron C. Taylor on a mission to Rome to speak with Pius XII. The idea was to try to secure an interpretation of the Church's teaching that would allow American Catholics in good conscience to support lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union. The pope's solution was to supply an "interpretation of the encyclical of Pius XI as not condemning the Russian people, but as directed [only] against Soviet practices in respect to religious liberty."[\[ix\]](#)

The Apostolic Delegate in Washington was instructed by the Holy See to convey this papal interpretation to appropriate American Catholic bishops. Soon the Archbishop of Cincinnati, John McNicholas, O.P., issued a pastoral letter embodying the interpretation; and, shortly after that, on November 16, 1941, only three weeks before America would find herself at war, the American bishops issued a statement "warning of the twin evils of Nazism and Communism, but recalling that Pius XI himself, while condemning atheistic Communism, had professed his paternal and compassionate benevolence for the peoples of Russia."[\[ix\]](#) Thus ended opposition by American Catholics to lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union.

This whole incident showing a decided Pius XII tilt towards the allies (when he *could* so act without violating Vatican neutrality) provides yet one more example of how the authors under review here report, or fail to report, specific words and actions of the wartime pope depending upon their own viewpoints. Almost all of the pro-Pius authors report this action of the pope (Blet, 126; Marchione, 66-67; Rychlak, 161-162). *None* of the anti-Pius authors reports it or even alludes to it; nor does the "neutral" author, José Sánchez. Unfortunately, we could cite other examples of this same kind of one-sidedness. It cannot but raise questions about the extent to which we are getting the whole truth about Pope Pius XII in some of these books.

4) Was Pope Pius XII an anti-Semite?

The main accusation in the whole Pius XII controversy is that the pope, as a moral leader and head of a worldwide Church, did not do or say what he could and should have done and said to help the Jews during the Holocaust. Those seeking an explanation for what they consider to be his silence and inaction have sometimes asked whether the pope was himself possibly anti-Semitic, sharing in or at least tolerating the historic anti-Semitism unfortunately found in Christian Europe. Merely to ask the question in the post-Holocaust era of greater sensitivity to the great wrong done to the Jews, however, is almost inevitably to stigmatize the person about whom the question is even asked.

No one can disagree that the Nazi attack on the Jewish people was indeed unique. As historian Michael Burleigh puts it: "The comprehensiveness of the 'Final Solution' differentiated it from Nazi violence towards such categories of people as Communists, Conservative Catholic Poles, or homosexuals, persecutions of whom did not routinely extend to killing every family member."^[xi]

Being Jewish constituted a category all by itself. Yet, at the time, this may not have been as clear as it is today. As Burleigh himself goes on to point out:

Nazi killing started first with *German* mental patients and defectives in the euthanasia program before the war; after the beginning of the war, the Nazis began killing indiscriminately those who got in their way--not just Jews, but Poles, Gypsies, "Bolsheviks," etc. The killing intensified after the attack on Russia--and all this before the "Final Solution" was even decided upon (emphasis added).^[xii]

There has been much discussion in the literature, including in the books under review, about just what the pope knew about the Holocaust against the Jews and when he knew it. The general assumption seems to be that if and when he knew anything definite about what we *now* know to have been going on in Eastern Europe, he most assuredly should have spoken out against it. This is the Rolf Hochhuth thesis, of course, which has seemed to command near universal assent from the time that it was first articulated.

That other allied leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill similarly did not speak out effectively against the Holocaust while it was going on is not thought to be pertinent to the case of Pius XII, since the latter professed to be primarily a spiritual and moral leader, and the Holocaust constituted an unprecedented moral issue for the world.

However, distinguishing the uniqueness of the Holocaust against the Jews

from everything else that was going on at the time may have been a much more complicated thing than would appear to be the case today. For those living through the horrors of World War II, the problem may have been knowing even where to begin to sort out and take in all the evils that were occurring on all sides, much less denounce or find remedies for them that seem obvious more than fifty years later. As Michael Burleigh, again, remarks: "We need to grasp imaginatively what really mattered to them rather than casting around for signs of their alertness to what matters half a century later."[\[lxiii\]](#)

Similarly, the six million Jews who perished amid the alleged indifference of Pope Pius XII (not to speak of that of virtually all of the other allied war leaders as well) is a figure that has since been drummed into and fixed in our minds. In our era of books and articles and TV specials on the Holocaust, Holocaust museums, and movies such as *Schindler's List*, we truly never can forget the six million. But it was by no means as evident a datum to those who were also contemporary witnesses of the murder of some nine million additional *non*-Jewish victims as well, at least three million of whom were Catholic Poles; then there were the yet three million *more* Soviet prisoners of war who perished at the hands of the Nazis.[\[lxiv\]](#) And this is not to speak of the enormous numbers of soldiers being killed on both sides of the conflict--they and their families were a traditional concern of the Holy See in wartime.

The sheer, numbing horror of such numbers, along with the fact that, short of defeating the Germans and winning the war, little or nothing could really be done for most of these victims, might give us a somewhat different perspective on the particular position of the Vatican in the midst of all this carnage. And this is true even granting that Pius XII "knew." As William J. vanden Heuvel points out in a notable article in *American Heritage* magazine, *all* of the World War II leaders essentially "knew" as the tragedy of the Holocaust unfolded in Nazi-occupied Europe; but that did not mean there was very much they could do about it beyond going on to try to win the war:

Some critics of American policy during these years maintain that the news of the annihilation of Europe's Jews was deliberately kept secret so that our people would not know about it and that if Americans had been aware of the Final Solution, they would have insisted on doing more than was done. The facts are otherwise. President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, General Eisenhower, General Marshall, the intelligence services of the Allied nations, every Jewish leader, the Jewish communities in America, in Britain, in Palestine, and yes, anyone who had a radio

or newspaper in 1942 knew that Jews in colossal numbers were being murdered. They may have received the news with disbelief; there was, after all, no precedent for it in human history. But the general information of the genocide was broadly available to anyone who would read or listen. [\[lxv\]](#)

Those who contend today that publicizing the horror of the Holocaust against the Jews--say, by a strong statement from the pope--might have led to a significantly different outcome for the Jews of Europe may perhaps have forgotten the many millions sacrificed in the Soviet and Chinese Communist "holocausts"--the latter still going on today, for example, in Tibet--whom no condemnatory statements have ever served to save.

Nor have the after-the-fact advocates of a public "exposure" of Hitler evidently paid very close attention to some of the subsequent "holocausts" we have witnessed in recent years: the "killing fields" in Cambodia in the 1970s, Iraq's savage attacks on its Kurdish population in the 1980s, and the genocide of the Hutus against the Tutsis in Rwanda and that of the Serbs against the Muslims in Bosnia in the 1990s. All of these events were roundly deplored at the time by world leaders, including especially the popes; but again no mechanism was generally available to stop those bent on genocide (although the recent U.S. and European intervention which saved thousands of Kosovar Albanians may count as at least one honorable and hopeful exception). But UN resolutions, no more than papal statements, have really proved to be of much help in such situations.

In spite of the fact that, at the time, Pius XII surely thought that speaking out was useless if not counter-productive, the fact that he did not do so in the way some now say that he should have has raised the question of whether the pope was not himself an anti-Semite. Several of our authors apparently believe and either state or very strongly imply that he was.

We have already quoted David Kertzer's belief that he "could never bring himself to utter the word 'Jew'" while millions of them were being murdered; perhaps this belief is not even surprising for the author of a book devoted to proving that virtually *all* the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popes up to and including Pius XII accepted and fostered anti-Semitism because, in the view of David Kertzer, it was also the view of the Catholic Church; the problem, he thinks, "lies not in the personality or the moral qualities of a single pope, but rather in a much more pervasive culture of Vatican anti-Semitism." He takes it for granted that Pius XII held "stridently anti-Semitic views," but adopts as his subject the broader task of "bringing to light the role his predecessors played over the previous decades in dehumanizing the Jews, and in encouraging large numbers of

Europeans to view them as evil and dangerous" (Kertzer, 16).

Like Kertzer, Garry Wills devotes part of his book, not merely to the record of Pius XII, but to what he too sees as the deficiencies and possible anti-Semitism of the popes who preceded him. Pope Pius XI, for example, famous for his encyclical against the Nazis, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, as well as for his famous statement that "spiritually we are Semites," nevertheless hardly had a spotless record, according to Wills (although he does not go as far as Kertzer). Wills emphasizes that a yet earlier statement by Pius XI against anti-Semitism (in 1928) was actually only made in connection with the *suppression* of a pro-Jewish Catholic group.

Another proposed encyclical commissioned by Pius XI, which would have specifically condemned anti-Semitism, was never issued. If it had come out, Wills speculates, "it would have made it harder for Pius XII to maintain his ambiguities and silences about the Holocaust as it was occurring" (Wills, 32-33).

Susan Zuccotti devotes her whole first chapter to a discussion of what she also sees as the deficiencies of Pius XI and the Vatican in not forthrightly condemning, and, therefore, in condoning, the European brand of anti-Semitism which eventually became transformed into such a lethal motive in the case of Adolf Hitler and his followers. Even though Pius XI condemned racism in *Mit Brennender Sorge*, "he never mentioned anti-Semitism or Jews," she notes (Zuccotti, 8).

Michael Phayer is briefer though no less condemnatory of the Church for failing to go on record against anti-Semitism as such. Phayer goes on to criticize Pius XII for not coming to grips with the problem even after the war, when, as he puts it, "moral questions relating to anti-Semitism, restitution, and strict justice for war criminals fell outside the pontiff's concerns" (Phayer, 8 & 83).

John Cornwell, for his part, actually claims to have begun his book with the intention of defending Pius XII, only to find that he had to change course dramatically, when he discovered to his "moral shock" a diplomatic message from the papal nunciature in Bavaria, then headed by Eugenio Pacelli, covering the brief period when Communist revolutionaries had taken power there in 1919. The message in question was a report on a visit to the headquarters of the Bavarian "Soviet," and it describes the revolutionaries in very uncomplimentary terms as "a gang...of dubious appearance, Jews like the rest of them."

Although this report went to Rome over the signature of Eugenio Pacelli as head of the nunciature, he very probably did not write it; it was an assistant of his who personally made the visit to the office of the revolutionaries and no doubt later penned the unflattering description of them. Yet Cornwell takes this letter as firm evidence of the personal anti-Semitism of the future Pius XII: "The repeated

references to the Jewishness of these individuals, amid the catalogue of epithets describing their physical and moral repulsiveness, gives an expression of stereotypical anti-Semitic contempt" (Cornwell, 74-76).

It would seem to be stretching things pretty far, though, to imagine that this routine diplomatic despatch signed by the future pope constitutes any "proof" of anti-Semitism. Cornwell cites another equally trivial case where the papal nuncio to Bavaria declined to help a local rabbi get around wartime import restrictions on palm fronds for worship (Cornwell, 70-71). This is pretty thin stuff on which to base the grave charge of anti-Semitism.

Yet all of the anti-Pius authors under review here provide support for the thesis which Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, for his part, bases *on* these particular books and some others: namely, that not only was Pius XII anti-Semitic, his immediate predecessors were as well, as, indeed, the Catholic Church herself was and is anti-Semitic today.

It is true that the Catholic Church, like many other groups and institutions today, has had to re-examine and come to terms with past attitudes and practices of Catholics which, in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust against the Jews, are now clearly seen as wrong and unacceptable for Christians. Before World War II too many Catholics unfortunately did accept and share in a kind of "traditional" European anti-Semitism, whether the religious variety, which sometimes saw the Jews as not only rejecting Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, but as implicated in his crucifixion; or the more modern socio-political variety, which saw the Jews as a separatist, exclusivist group with too much wealth and influence in societies into which they were also not always fully integrated as loyal citizens. There were also "degrees," of course, in both kinds of anti-Semitism, from mild to more serious. And it is unfortunately historically true that anti-Semitism was particularly strong in some predominantly Catholic countries such as Austria, France, and Poland.

At the Second Vatican Council held between 1962-65, the Catholic Church attempted to provide a corrective to the anti-Semitism into which some of the Church's members had been prone to fall. The Council did this by enacting its Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. In this document, the Church officially declared that "neither all Jews indiscriminately...nor Jews today can be charged with crimes committed during [Christ's] passion...[they] should not be spoken of as rejected or as cursed as if this followed from Holy Scripture...The Church reproveth, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life, or religion." [\[lxvii\]](#)

While this Declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council definitively put the Catholic Church on record against any kind of anti-Semitism, it amounted to too little coming too late in the eyes of some. Certainly it did little to mitigate the vehemence of the controversy over Pope Pius XII which was just then rising to its first height following the spectacular success of Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*. This already seemingly never-ending controversy prompted the Church in 1998 to issue the document *We Remember: A Reflection on the "Shoah,"* as we have noted. Pope John Paul II fervently hoped that this latter document would finally "help to heal the wounds of past misunderstandings"; he also called upon Catholics "to purify their hearts through repentance of past errors and infidelities."[\[lxvii\]](#)

John Paul II, of course, as a Pole who lived through the years of mass murder of both Jews and Poles in Poland, has been a fervent advocate of reconciliation between Jews and Christians, not only in his official teaching documents and his spoken words, but in his moving visits to Auschwitz in 1979, to the Jewish Synagogue in Rome in 1986, and to Jerusalem and the state of Israel in March, 2000. But while John Paul II's efforts have generally been appreciated in Jewish quarters, these efforts have had little or no influence on those determined to indict, try, and convict Pius XII--or, indeed, the Church herself, now accused of condoning and fostering anti-Semitism, if she is not herself anti-Semitic.

The *We Remember* document attempted to make a distinction between what it called anti-Judaism (or traditional "religious" anti-Semitism) and anti-Semitism properly speaking, "based on theories contrary to the constant teaching of the Church on the unity of the human race and on the equal dignity of all races and peoples."[\[lxviii\]](#)

According to David Kertzer, however, this distinction will "simply not survive historical scrutiny" (Kertzer, 7). Garry Wills agrees, doubting that *We Remember* is entitled to "any serious consideration as an honest confrontation with a complicated history" (Wills, 16). Michael Phayer finds the document "flawed but basically affirmative" (Phayer, 215), while Susan Zuccotti calls it "commendable" and its words "balanced, reasonable, and fair as far as they go," yet still containing "important errors and gaps" (Zuccotti, 325).

Thus, none of the anti-Pius authors whose books were published subsequent to the issuance of this statement really accepts the Church's own efforts to deal with the problem of "Catholic" anti-Semitism. It is not clear what the Church or Catholics could ever do or say in order to be freed from the charges now being laid upon them--beyond perhaps simple acceptance of those charges as

the anti-Pius authors now frame them.

Yet the basic distinction between traditional European anti-Semitism--itself wrong as the Church has now declared--and the lethal anti-Semitism that came to be practiced by Hitler and company during World War II, is surely valid. Europeans, including Christians, mostly violated their own declared democratic principles when they discriminated against or imposed disabilities upon Jews simply because they were Jews; this was wrong. Yet it was a very different and much less serious thing than the systematic extermination of the Jews instituted by the Nazis. Yes, there were earlier anti-Semites who expressed very ugly sentiments towards the Jews, but until Hitler came along determined to act on such sentiments when he had the power to do so, few took them very seriously.

Hitler, for his part, as early as World War I, was already speaking of the Jews as "vermin," wishing for their "annihilation" (*Vernichtung*), and expressly saying that they should be held "under poison gas." Similarly, the early Nazis spoke with extreme violence about the Jews.^[lxix] Few took this aspect of Nazi ideology seriously, though, until after the Nazis gained power--when it was too late.

This kind of hatred to the death--including the willingness to act on it--is different in kind, not merely in degree, from the kind of (often casual) prejudice against the Jews that was found earlier in Europe and which, unhappily, the Catholic Church also tolerated in her members to too great an extent. But if no distinctions are any longer going to be recognized; if "anti-Semitism" is going to be considered one, single, monolithic, seamless kind of prejudice against the Jews; if no expressions of regret for harboring such prejudice are any longer adequate or acceptable; and if any criticism of the Jews (or of individual Jews), or, in the case of Pius XII, simply "silence" about them, is going to be taken as "proof" of a kind of anti-Semitism that has meanwhile become almost a synonym for "evil"--then it is hard to see how it is ever going to be overcome.

Yet even Jewish writers have commonly made the basic distinction that the Church tried to make in *We Remember*. One Israeli historian, for example, writes:

Christian anti-Semitism was not as virulent as racial anti-Semitism. It stigmatized Jewish perfidy, but it permitted the Jew to exist (though not to flourish) as the living witness to the truth of Christianity. The Jew must remain to act out his pre-ordained ignominious role as villain in the drama of salvation, at the end of which he would be crowned with glory. But he was always free to abrogate his covenant with Jehovah and accept the benevolent efforts of the church to redeem him. According to racial theory,

however, baptism could not penetrate the tainted Jewish seed; the deep stain could only be removed by destroying the source of the infection and its bearer, the physical Jew. The Jew must not only be excoriated but eliminated. Christianity, insofar as it had succumbed to Jewish influences, was also culpable, since Christian agape, love and pity, like the Jewish logos, law, and reason, had alienated man from nature and weakened him in his struggle for existence.^[lxx]

Or, as Hannah Arendt aptly expressed the same basic distinction, though much more starkly: "Jews had been able to escape from Judaism into conversion; from Jewishness there was no escape."^[lxxi]

Such distinctions seem to have been lost in the course of the present controversy over Pius XII. Even "serious" scholars feel able to characterize him as anti-Semitic in the post-Holocaust climate of opinion that prevails today. It is no longer clear what defense could possibly be offered for him.

Ralph McNerny, for example, reports that Pius XII used up most of his personal assets inherited from the Pacellis to help the Jews (McInerny, 129). Ronald Rychlak, though, is the main pro-Pius author to address the charge of anti-Semitism, and his defense mainly consists of citing wartime voices, especially Jewish voices, praising the pope for his efforts on behalf of the Jews (Rychlak, 252-256). Rychlak also discusses the *We Remember* document, and clearly reiterates the distinction in it between the kind of anti-Semitism found among Christians and that of the Nazis: "The Final Solutions entailed two elements that were new and did not evolve from Christian theology: the view of racial Jewishness which rendered baptism irrelevant and the commitment to extermination of the Jewish people" (Rychlak, 254).

The "neutral" author, José Sánchez includes a brief but competent survey of the views of various historians who have addressed the question of the pope's possible anti-Semitism. He finds the charge to be "the unstated undercurrent in the argument of many of Pius's strongest critics. Few say it outright because they regard it as taken for granted" (Sánchez, 71). Although Sánchez effectively skewers some of the more extreme allegations of anti-Semitism on the part of the pope, he typically comes to no firm conclusion in the matter himself.

The principal defense that all the pro-Pius authors make for the pope, in fact, is to cite favorable testimonials of him from various Jewish figures. As it happens, there are a plethora of such testimonials that can be cited (Blet, 199-200; Marchione, 76-77 & 90; McNerny, 140-142; and Rychlak, 239-243). Even the *We Remember* document includes such citations:

m From the head of the wartime Italian Hebrew Commission, Dr. Joseph Nathan, who praised the pope and Catholics "who recognized the persecuted as their brothers."

m From the Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress, Dr. A. Leo Kubowitzler, who conveyed to Pius XII "the warmest thanks for the efforts of the Catholic Church on behalf of Jews throughout Europe during the war."

m From the Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, who said at the death of the pope that "the life of our times was enriched by a voice speaking out about great moral truths above the tumult of daily conflict. [\[lxxii\]](#)

Thus, a Prime Minister of Israel actually *praised* Pius XII for "speaking out"--the very thing he is reproached for *not* doing in the anti-Pius literature! In this single instance we glimpse once again one of the fundamental dichotomies in the whole Pius XII controversy: namely, how the different observers view the same body of facts so very differently.

It might seem that so many testimonials from Jewish figures would at least have raised some questions about how well founded the continuing accusations against Pius XII are. But nothing of the kind seems to have occurred. Speaking of the situation in Italy, Susan Zuccotti discounts these Jewish testimonials by stating that they were "often rooted in benevolent ignorance" of what she thinks Pius actually did, or, rather, did *not* do for the Jews; and further that Jewish leaders "were anxious to protect and preserve the fragile good will between Jews and non-Jews that seemed to be emerging from the rubble of the war in Italy. The last thing they wanted was recrimination for past offenses" (Zuccotti, 301-302).

One thing that becomes clear about even the bare charge of anti-Semitism today, though, is that, once made, the charge is only too likely to *stick*. At any rate, this has been the fate of Pope Pius XII. Regardless of what the record shows--or does *not* show, because in all these books there is *no* firm proof of any anti-Semitism, either religious or racial, on the part of the pope--we inhabit a climate where the publisher of the *New Republic*, for example, can still casually refer to him as an "evil man," as if that were perfectly obvious to everyone. Similarly, our five anti-Pius authors can simply take the charge for granted, and go on from there--while their books go on being taken with the utmost seriousness as accurate histories about the pope.

5) What credit (or responsibility) belonged to Pius XII for the actions of Catholics in favor of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe?

Beginning with Rolf Hochhuth, a recurring idea among the anti-Pius authors is that merely by "speaking out," Pope Pius XII could somehow have *compelled* "devout Catholics" to do his bidding. That he is apparently thought to have possessed such power seems to be one of the strongest reasons for condemning him for not having spoken out in the way that his critics have wished. Quite apart from the fact that some of the Catholics the pontiff had to deal with would seem to have been rather far from being *devout*, the whole notion that Catholics are somehow more than others disposed simply to "follow orders" from the Church can no more be verified by reference to the Church during World War II than it can by reference to the contemporary Church. Nevertheless the idea persists.

Yet this idea is in conflict with another dominant idea found among the anti-Pius authors, most notably, Susan Zuccotti, and, to a lesser extent, Michael Phayer, namely: that such help, rescue, and shelter work as was carried out by Catholics on behalf of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe was largely done on their own initiative, and not in response to any Vatican "policy" or "orders" issued by the pope. This is believed to be the case because the scholars in the anti-Pius camp, after diligent searches, have failed to turn up any "orders" issued by the silent and passive pope. As we shall see, Zuccotti is literally obsessed with the need to find "written directives" (Zuccotti, 192 and *passim*) before Pius XII can be credited with anything.

This conflict is never resolved: on the one hand, Pope Pius XII, culpably, it is charged, never issued any orders to help the Jews; on the other hand, Catholics within the authoritarian Church structure--who manifestly did on many and varied occasions help or shelter Jews--would have so acted, it is also maintained, only if the pope and other Church authorities had told them to; that, after all, was the very reason why the pope was so urgently required to speak out.

Common sense might suggest a different answer, which probably comes closer to the reality: namely, that many Catholics, clerical, lay, and religious, often did extend help to Jews where they were able to do so (even in spite of the often extremely dangerous consequences for them if caught); at the same time, from the top of the Church's authority structure, the pope and (at least in some countries such as France) the bishops both created an atmosphere and in various other ways let it be known that help was indeed to be extended to Jews where possible, even while the Church herself was struggling to carry on under a totalitarian regime that was also engaged in persecuting *her* in various ways.

Probably there is no answer that will satisfy everybody to the question of what credit should go to Church leaders for those actions by Catholics that did result in helping Jews; nevertheless, it does seem that if Pius XII is to be held

responsible for what the Church failed to do, then he at least ought to be given some credit for what the Church did do.

Regardless of the skepticism of some of the anti-Pius authors, the Nazis at least seemed to suspect that there was some consistent, concerted Church policy at work in favor of the Jews. Ronald Rychlak, for example, quotes a report to Hitler summarizing an interview with a Catholic Ukrainian archbishop which noted that "his ideas are the same as the French bishops, the Belgian bishops, and the Dutch bishops, just as if they all received identical instructions from the Vatican" (Rychlak, 413).

Two future popes, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, who became Pope John XXIII, and Giovanni Batista Montini, who became Pope Paul VI, were among the numerous witnesses who publicly testified after the war that in helping the Jews in the measure that they were able to help them, they were acting in accordance with the express policy and wishes of Pope Pius XII. In the climate created by the continuing charges concerning the alleged moral deficiencies of Pius XII, however, the testimony or word of two other popes similarly now seems to count for little or nothing: the charges against the wartime pope must stand. All of the anti-Pius authors are fully convinced of this; but they are far from having made their case.

IV.

Having now looked at these general questions surrounding the role of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust against the Jews, we must now look at each of the volumes under review in turn:

Pius XII and the Second World War: According to the Archives of the Vatican (Blet)

This book is a compendium of the twelve volumes of the *Acts and Documents of the Holy See (ADSS)* published by the Holy See between 1965 and 1981. Father Blet is the only surviving member of the team of four Jesuits commissioned by Pope Paul VI to cull the documents pertaining to the war out of the vast archives of the Vatican Secretariat of State. Because there was so little public awareness even of the existence of these twelve important volumes, and also because they have been so comparatively little consulted and used, even by many of those actively engaged in the current Pius XII controversy, Father Blet decided that a summary volume, or compendium, of the whole series would be

valuable.

The result is an extremely valuable addition to the documentation that is now available for anyone who wants to understand the range, scope, complexity, and particular difficulties of the Vatican's wartime position and role. The subject matter is not limited to questions concerning the Holocaust, but deals with World War II issues generally--this is necessarily the case because the Vatican was engaged in dealing with all these issues generally at the time, not just with the Holocaust.

No great "revelations" emerge from this summary of pertinent documents in the Vatican archives. The book is clear, careful, scholarly, and not at all polemical. Only in the last nine pages comprising his Conclusion does a hint of emotion on the author's part creep in; otherwise, he allows the sober documentation he summarizes, along with his own brief and knowledgeable commentary on it, to speak for itself.

And it largely does speak for itself: it gives a true picture of what the Vatican's wartime situation was, and what the Vatican attempted to do about it as events unfolded. The material is divided topically rather than being presented chronologically.

Only indirectly does the book address the principal questions concerning Pius XII and his words and actions during the war. It is not intended to be an "answer" to the charges against him. It is necessary to read the documentation carefully in the light of the helpful commentary Father Blet provides in order to see a fuller picture emerging.

Nevertheless, the careful reader will be able to supply some significant "answers" to some of the major questions that have been raised in the on-going Pius XII controversy. On the whole question of "speaking out," for example, Pius XII wrote to Cardinal Preysing, the bishop of Berlin, on April 30, 1943, as follows:

We give 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, *ad majora mala vitanda* [to avoid greater evil] despite alleged reasons to the contrary (Blet, 66).

It is hard not to conclude from documents such as this that Pius XII was entirely sincere in his belief that he had properly "delegated" to the bishops--who knew the conditions in their own countries--the responsibility for whatever "speaking out" that needed to be done; and that the pope really believed that he

was doing what he was able to do to confront the manifold evils that surrounded and indeed engulfed him. Over and over again in these pages the careful reader will see other key events in a rather different perspective than they have normally been presented in the course of the long controversy over Pius XII.

Furthermore, consideration of the kinds of papal activity and interventions that these documents reveal strongly suggests that there are not going to be any sensational revelations or "bombshells" when the archives pertaining to the pontificate of Pius XII have been opened up in their entirety. We substantially have the full story already, and it is mostly a matter of correctly interpreting the story we have.

Short of reading all of the twelve ADSS volumes, this volume is indispensable for anyone who really aims to understand and settle in his own mind the truth about Pope Pius XII, the Second World War, and the Holocaust.

Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII (Cornwell)

This is the book that effectively rekindled the controversy over Pope Pius XII. Its title alone tells where the author is coming from. It is such an unmitigatedly bad book in so many ways, though, that it is difficult to know where to begin in critiquing it. Many reviewers of the book when it came out saw this immediately and said it plainly.

For example, Kenneth L. Woodward in *Newsweek* magazine for September 27, 1999, noted that "errors of fact and ignorance of context appear on almost every page. Cornwell questions Pacelli's every motive, but never doubts those who tell a different story." Reviewing the book in the January, 2000, issue of *First Things*, William D. Rubenstein found the book to be "a malign exercise in defamation of character and character assassinations. The author has, in my view, consistently misread and misunderstood both Pacelli's actions and the context in which they occurred" (both reviews quoted in Rychlak, 427).

In his own book under review here, Ronald Rychlak has included an entire long chapter critiquing Cornwell's book in some detail. It is devastating. There is virtually nothing left, either of the author's thesis or of his presentation of it (Rychlak, 281-307).

Yet Cornwell's book has been a huge popular success, even a best seller. It has successfully tapped into feelings that some people were obviously having. The book is still to be seen prominently displayed in bookstores, and the author continues to be widely interviewed on the talk shows, his credibility as an "expert" on Pius XII seemingly intact. The negative reviews have not fazed him because

he has garnered too many of the other kind. The late Tad Szulc, for example, long-time *New York Times* correspondent and himself the author of a biography of Pope John Paul II, begins his review of the book in *The Washington Post's Book World* as follows:

The title tells the tale. And a chilling tale it is: Eugenio Pacelli, the Vatican's all-powerful secretary of state, made it possible for Adolf Hitler to achieve total power in Germany and, as Pope Pius XII, went on to appease him, maintaining inexplicable public silence as the Nazis destroyed and massacred millions of European Jews before and during World War II. In other words, the pro-Germany and "anti-Judaic" Pacelli--who had spent thirteen years in Munich and Berlin as papal nuncio--bears, according to this most important book, awesome personal responsibility for the evil of Hitler, and, consequently, for opening the way for the war and the Holocaust. [\[lxxiii\]](#)

Tad Szulc, who presumably gained some knowledge about the Vatican and the Catholic Church in writing his biography of Pope John Paul II, nevertheless entirely accepts John Cornwell's fantastic thesis that, in negotiating the Vatican Concordat with Nazi Germany in 1933, the then Vatican Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli played a "major role...in turning Hitler into Germany's undisputed leader." The conclusion of this Concordat is also supposed to have caused the demise of the Catholic Center Party in Germany. Quoting Cornwell, Szulc claims the Center Party "had the votes" to block Hitler. By supposedly agreeing with the disbanding of the Center Party in exchange for the Concordat, Cardinal Pacelli is supposed to have "handed Hitler automatic victory."

This judgment of Cornwell's, endorsed by Szulc, is flatly contradicted by the first historian writing about these events to whom I happened to turn. Joachim Fest, in his magisterial biography of Hitler, expressly states that the Center Party "was *not* in a position to prevent passage of the [Enabling] Act" (emphasis added), which allowed Hitler to suppress legally *all* the German political parties except the National Socialist Party; the Center Party, in fact, was the last to go, after harsh persecution. [\[lxxiv\]](#)

However, nothing deters Cornwell, nor, apparently, admirers of his such as Szulc, from offering many other similarly skewed presentations of events during the pontificate of Pius XII. He does it over and over again. To take one other example: he ascribes the Concordat which the Vatican concluded with Serbia in 1914 to the machinations of the young diplomat Eugenio Pacelli, who was then a very junior member of the Vatican's negotiating team. This Serbian Concordat no

longer granted traditional extra-territorial rights to Austria-Hungary to "protect" Catholics living in Orthodox Serbia; and this, in turn, according to Cornwell, so enraged Austrian nationalists that they were doubly determined to go all out against Serbia. It was Austria-Hungary's ultimatum to Serbia after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, of course, which brought about World War I. Thus, the future Pius XII not only guaranteed the rise of Hitler, he was also a major player in bringing about World War II! Unfortunately, this is no exaggeration of the kind of thing Cornwell writes (Cornwell, 48-51).

The book is replete with such howlers. Cornwell's view of Concordats, which were traditional Vatican instruments intended to secure the rights and status of the Catholic Church in the countries where they were negotiated, seems to be that they really served to fasten greater centralized Vatican control over the local Churches in those countries. This is absurd, since the degree of "control" that the Holy See exercises over the Catholic Churches in various countries was governed then, as it is governed now, by the Church's Code of Canon Law. But in Cornwell's view, all this was manipulated by Eugenio Pacelli, who was a plotter and a schemer from the very beginning of his career as a Vatican diplomat.

Cornwell's ultimate judgment on Pius XII has been widely quoted:

...failure to utter a candid word about the Final Solution in progress proclaimed to the world that the Vicar of Christ was not moved to pity and anger. From this point of view he was the ideal Pope for Hitler's unspeakable plan. He was Hitler's pawn. He was Hitler's Pope (Cornwell, 296-297).

This defamatory judgment is directly based by the author on what he calls Pius XII's "long-standing anti-Semitism" (Cornwell, 295). We saw earlier the highly tenuous basis on which he arrived at this judgment that the pope was himself anti-Semitic (i.e., the message describing the Bavarian revolutionaries which Eugenio Pacelli probably did not even write). Most of the other findings and arguments in this book are no better grounded; as the *Newsweek* reviewer said, "errors of fact and ignorance of context appear on almost every page."

So the question becomes: not only how a book such as this could be so favorably reviewed in some quarters and become a best seller, establishing the author as an "authority" on Pius XII; the question becomes how could a book such as this have so re-ignited the Pius XII controversy that we are now reviewing no less than ten books on the subject with a promise of more to come?

John Cornwell seems to have touched a chord here so deep that it does not even seem to matter how bad and vulgar and silly his book is; the "Hitler's pope" sobriquet has nevertheless been successfully applied and it remains in place; people seem to want to believe regardless of the evidence that the pope was indeed

"guilty" as charged.

Yet the book is more than just bad; it is dishonest. The dishonesty begins on the cover, where we find an ecclesiastically garbed Eugenio Pacelli emerging from a building and taking a salute from a German officer, while soldiers wearing the familiar curved German helmets stand around. The immediate impression given is that here is the future pope in evident close collaboration with the Nazi regime if not coming out of a visit with Adolf Hitler himself.

Yet the photograph in question was taken back in the days of the Weimar Republic. Eugenio Pacelli left Germany in 1929, four years before the Nazis came to power. He never returned. He never met Hitler in person.

The same basic dishonesty continues in the book's title, which speaks of the *secret* history of Pius XII; and, in his Preface, the author claims to have been given access to "unseen material" on which his whole thesis is supposedly based. Yet the *relator* for the sainthood cause of Pius XII, Father Peter Gumpel, S.J., has confirmed that Cornwell had access to no "secret" material whatsoever (Rychlak, 285-286). His elaborate hocus-pocus about this is apparently a complete fabrication.

We cannot go further here into the many errors and distortions that abound in this book. Readers are referred to the Epilogue in Ronald Rychlak's book, which also contains extensive notes. It is worth mentioning further only that John Cornwell includes in this book an entire chapter entitled "Pius XII Redivivus," which critically discusses the pope's successors, especially Pope John Paul II. As Cornwell sees it, the present pope is unfortunately continuing the same Vatican centralization and authoritarianism, which, in his view, brought Pius XII to grief. The inclusion of this chapter gives credence to the view of those who have said that some of the anti-Pius authors are really aiming as much at the papacy and its teaching office as they are at the wartime pope himself. It is not accidental that John Cornwell followed *Hitler's Pope* with another book entitled *Breaking Faith: The Pope, the People, and the Fate of Catholicism* in which he takes on directly the papacy and its teaching office.

The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism (Kertzer)

David I. Kertzer is a professor at Brown University and the author of a previous book which made quite a stir, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*. [lxxv] He briefly retells the same story in this volume as well, and it is not a story which shows the nineteenth-century papacy in its best light. Edgardo

Mortara was a six-year-old Jewish boy who, in June, 1858, was forcibly and permanently removed from his family by the police of the Papal States and taken to a special Home to be raised as a Christian--all this in strict accordance with the laws in force in the Papal States at the time.

The background of this extraordinary abduction was that a Christian servant working (illegally) in the Mortara home had secretly baptized young Edgardo at a moment when he was ill and she feared he was going to die. He later recovered, but, after all, he *had* been baptized; and therefore, as the Church taught then, and teaches now, he was a Catholic!

But if he was now a Catholic, it was the settled understanding of the day, reflected in the laws of the Papal States, that for the good of his own soul he must be raised a Catholic, with access to the sacraments and ministrations of the Church. Once the servant had reported the fact of the baptism to the authorities, there was immediately seen to be a "need" for Edgardo to be removed from his Jewish home and family.

At the height of the public outcry in Europe against the pope and the Papal States over this incident, Blessed Pope Pius IX stood fast; he personally told the French Ambassador that Edgardo had actually *begged* him--his word!--to allow him to remain in a Catholic setting; and that he, the pope, was only doing his duty by the boy, even though he had "the misfortune of having displeased the entire world" as a consequence. Edgardo never returned to his parents and eventually became a Catholic priest (Kertzer, 118-125).

This is the kind of story calculated to produce the kind of "moral shock" which John Cornwell claimed to have experienced when he read the letter from the nunciature in the Vatican archives describing the 1919 Bavarian revolutionaries. The actions of the pope and the Church in the Edgardo Mortara case strike us as simply indefensible today; nor would the Church attempt to defend them today; today the Church would see the rights of the parents as taking precedence over the moral obligation to provide a Catholic upbringing and formation to a baptized person.

But that was obviously not the case in 1858. The laws and customs of the Papal States, hold-overs as they certainly were from the European Age of Faith, placed great emphasis on the reality and objective validity of baptism and the other sacraments of the Church--even at the expense of the Church's teachings on natural justice and the rights of parents. Nor does it diminish the moral wrong done in this case to point out that in 1858, slavery was still legal in the United States, as was serfdom in Russia and some other parts of Eastern Europe: it was still just as wrong to take a child from his parents as it was to maintain human beings in servitude; that these things were still being done in 1858 does not speak

well for the Church *or* for the states involved.

Times change, though, even if moral truths do not. Still, it is perfectly legitimate and indeed desirable, however uncomfortable it may be for Christians, to learn the full truth about some of the things David Kertzer writes about that were still going on in the Papal States during some of the period he covers: forced baptisms, suspected ritual murders by Jews, the Roman Ghetto, and the spread of an unsavory anti-Semitism too often tolerated (though not, as Kertzer maintains, advocated) by the papacy.

It becomes a good deal less legitimate and desirable, however, when these historical occurrences are used to try to establish Catholic Church complicity in the Holocaust against the Jews in the following century. We are already familiar with this accusation as regards Pope Pius XII. David Kertzer's project, however, is to go all the way back to 1814 and try to show that the papacy and virtually all of the popes from then up to the election of Pius XII in 1939 thought and acted in strict continuity with the wartime pope as regards anti-Semitism.

Kertzer expressly links his case to that of John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*, in which, according to him, "Pope Pius XII's 'silence' is linked to his personal antipathy to the Jews, along with his larger conservative political agenda, which privileged maintaining good relations with the Nazi regime." Kertzer endorses this characterization, even as he goes on to ask: "But what if we find that Pius XII's benevolent predecessor shared the same stridently anti-Semitic views?" (Kertzer, 16).

What, indeed, if we find that virtually all of the popes from 1814 on are guilty of the same prejudice, evidenced by their successive failures to eschew the prejudice or abolish the disabilities suffered by the Jews in their domains?--and, later, after the end of the Papal States, by their acceptance and cooperation with anti-Semites and anti-Semitic parties in the various European countries?

This is what this book is all about. The author, though, is almost schizophrenic in his approach to his subject. On the one hand, he shows himself to be conscientious in handling his sources, including the Vatican archives (open for most of the period he is covering), and providing an interesting narrative about some little known historical occurrences. On the other hand, his superficial and labored efforts to link the popes themselves with the anti-Semitism that was spreading in Europe during the period are not convincing and are sometimes even laughable (if the accusations were not so serious).

Historically, of course, the popes were traditional defenders of the Jews against popular and state violence against them in Europe. Kertzer fails to show that this attitude was substantially changed in modern times.

He admits that the popes never espoused anti-Semitism in their public teachings and pronouncements; and, indeed, he correctly notes that they scarcely ever even mention the Jews at all. He ascribes this to expediency, and charges the popes with promoting anti-Semitism "out of the limelight" (Kertzer, 213).

It would be closer to the truth to say that throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the Jews and anti-Semitism were at the extreme margin of the popes' attention--often not on their radar screens at all. For more than a century, during the precise period covered by Kertzer, the popes were engaged on the political level in fighting what turned out to be a largely losing battle against liberal, secularizing, and anti-clerical European governments--what Pope Pius IX in his famous *Syllabus of Errors* so disastrously described (from the point of view of the Church's public relations) as "progress, liberalism, and modern civilization."

To the extent that the Jews were allied with these liberal, secularizing, and anti-clerical forces, they too could become targets of the Church's ire--although it was mostly right-wing political movements that reacted to the Jews on this account; the Jews' association or alliance with these forces was, indeed, one of the causes of the rise of anti-Semitism in some countries. But for the most part, the Jews were not a central concern of the popes until their unhappy situation was forced upon them with the rise of violent, modern racial anti-Semitism. This relative inattention to the affairs of the Jews generally probably even explains more of the conduct of Pius XI and Pius XII than most post-Holocaust writers could ever imagine or admit.

David Kertzer's aim of turning the popes into anti-Semites anyway, however, fails in virtually every instance. Let us take just a couple of examples.

Pope Leo XIII. Pope Leo XIII's Secretary of State, Cardinal Mariano Rampolla, sent back a routine courtesy form letter to an anti-Semitic French writer thanking the latter for sending complimentary copies of his book to the Vatican for both the pope and for the cardinal himself; the cardinal wrote that the pope "has asked me to thank you for it in his name, adding that he sends you a heartfelt apostolic benediction."

This form letter is supposed to "prove" the personal anti-Semitic sympathies of both Pope Leo XIII and Cardinal Rampolla himself. It proves nothing of the sort. Anyone who has ever served on the staff of almost any high public official, as I have, has written many such letters with almost identical wording ("asked me to thank you in his name") in response to unsolicited material sent in. As for the "apostolic benediction," routine Vatican mail probably contains dozens--or hundreds--of them regularly. I suspect that if David Kertzer sent *this* book in to the pope, he might get a similar courtesy form letter from the Vatican

back in reply!

Nevertheless, he is quite serious about his conviction that papal anti-Semitism is in play here. He elaborates further on his "proof," as follows:

The secretary of state's later claim, when news of the letter became public, that the Pope had this letter sent without having any idea what the book was about is clearly untrue. Both Cardinal Rampolla and Leo XIII knew exactly what kind of book it was, and what its purpose was. There is no question that they approved of both (Kertzer, 216).

The reason he is so sure that both pope and cardinal knew and approved is that the journal *Civiltà Cattolica* was printing a series of similar anti-Semitic articles at the same time, and, surely, it goes without saying that the pope and the secretary of state always knew about and approved of everything that appeared there.

But this interpretation is a stretch, if it does not actually border on guilt by association. Pope Leo XIII issued no less than 86 encyclicals in which his official teaching is set forth in great detail; there is no evidence in David Kertzer's book that he has read a single one of them, yet he feels able to deduce anti-Semitism from the pope's associations and routine correspondence.

Similarly, regarding the famous Dreyfus case--which David Kertzer covers only very superficially in a book about the "rise" of modern anti-Semitism--he records some of the not very successful efforts of the pope to try to tone down the French anti-Dreyfusard (and anti-Semitic) newspaper published by the Assumptionist Fathers, *La Croix*. He then goes on to say:

Nowhere in the many laments about the paper in these years was there ever a word of criticism regarding the paper's relentless and shrill anti-Semitic campaign. What *La Croix* had to say about the Jews was, to Pope Leo XIII and his secretary of state, Cardinal Rampolla, nothing remarkable in the least. *La Croix's* anti-Semitic screeds reflected...the worldview of the Pope and his secretary of state...(Kertzer, 177).

If this *isn't* guilt by association, it would be hard to say what it could possibly be: the newspaper's "anti-Semitic screeds...reflected" the views of the very pope who was vainly trying to tone the paper down!--illustrating again, in fact, the frequent inability of the popes to "compel" Catholics to do their bidding, as Rolf Hochhuth and others would have them do.

With regard to the Dreyfus case, the fact is that Pope Leo XIII was very emphatically on the side of the falsely accused Jewish Captain Alfred Dreyfus.

The pope even compared his sufferings when he was banished to Devil's Island to those of Christ on the cross. [\[lxxvi\]](#)

Pope Pius XI. This is the pope who in 1938 memorably declared that "anti-Semitism is a movement in which we Christians can have not part whatsoever...Spiritually we are Semites." [\[lxxvii\]](#) Although delivered to a small group of Belgians, the statement was widely publicized at the time, and has been even more widely publicized since. Convicting the author of this statement of anti-Semitism would seem to be a pretty difficult task, and David Kertzer does not even come close. The wonder is that he thought it necessary to try.

Like Leo XIII, Pius XI wrote a large number of encyclicals, 30 in all, setting forth his official teachings. Once again, there is no evidence in this book that David Kertzer has read any of them except *Mit Brennender Sorge*; still he feels quite able to expatiate on the pontiff's views. The principal "proof" he provides of the pope's alleged anti-Semitism has reference to the mission of the then Archbishop Achille Ratti, the future Pius XI, as papal nuncio in Poland in 1919. Popular anti-Semitic pogroms had broken out in a couple of places. Archbishop Ratti's own anti-Semitism, according to Kertzer's account, seems to have consisted of his forwarding to Rome various reports about this violence which he had received from local sources ascribing the problems to "provocations" by the Jews. Kertzer provides no real direct evidence that the future pope endorsed this view; the evidence he does cite shows that, for the most part, the Vatican envoy came to no definite conclusions at all, though in one case he makes what seems to be an eminently sensible comment that "the Jews blame the Christians, and the Christians blame the Jews." David Kertzer nevertheless seems to think the he has clinched his "proof" by observing that "the depths of anti-Semitism among the Catholic clergy of Poland at the time could hardly be overstated, yet Monsignor Ratti saw nothing amiss" (Kertzer, 256-257).

A contemporary biography, published before World War II and the Holocaust, tells a very different story about Achille Ratti's dealings with the Jews during his 1919 mission to Poland:

He gave numerous signs of his charitable nature and also of the Holy See's determination to frown on any possibility of Jewish pogroms, for wherever he went he took care to be as friendly with Polish Jews as he was with the Christians. On no occasion would he allow anybody to recognize a difference. [\[lxxviii\]](#)

In summary, David Kertzer's notion that most of the popes of the last couple of centuries were anti-Semites seems to be based mainly on the fact that they continued to have relationships with some of the members of their flocks

who--unfortunately--were themselves anti-Semitic in varying degrees. This is a pretty slender basis on which to convict an entire institution--the modern papacy--of the very serious charge of anti-Semitism. This book notably fails to prove its thesis.

Pope Pius XII - Architect or Peace (Marchione)

Sister Margherita Marchione is a member of the religious order, Religious Teachers Filippini, and is a retired professor of Italian language and literature. This is her second book related to the Holocaust question; she earlier published *Yours Is a Precious Witness: Memoirs of Jews and Catholics in Wartime Italy*.^[lxxix] Once the Pius XII broke out anew at the end of the 1990s, she soon made herself visible defending the accused pontiff in articles, letters to the editor, and media appearances. She has even debated John Cornwell, and it seems probable that she was able to score plenty of points since she is very knowledgeable about the whole issue and has read widely in the Holocaust literature, as attested by the valuable Annotated Bibliography included in this volume.

Sister Marchione's approach is quite frankly apologetical: she means to defend Pope Pius XII from what she regards as the unjust accusations that have been made against him, and it has to be said that she is pretty successful at it. She delves into issues and does not glide or gloss over items unfavorable to her cause, but generally tries to deal with them squarely and honestly. Nevertheless, it remains true that her tone is hardly one of scholarly objectivity; no doubt that has never been what she was aiming at anyway; still her approach gives partisans on the other side--who are not always that objective themselves!--an excuse not to take her too seriously. The anti-Pius authors ignore her completely, in fact, except for a dismissive footnote of Susan Zuccotti's referring to her previous book (Zuccotti, 346). Similarly, her book seems not to have been reviewed as widely as some of the other Pius XII books. Another factor in this relative neglect may lie in the fact that she is not a specialist but a literature teacher.

All this is unfortunate, for she provides a good overall summary of the Pius XII question, and includes some material not easily available elsewhere. In particular, she includes a good representative selection of some of the actual documents in the twelve-volume ADSS collection; these give the reader an excellent first-hand impression of some of the issues the Vatican was dealing with during the war (and also a good sense of what can, and cannot, be "proved" by examining mere official diplomatic documents).

She also includes useful articles by the past defenders of Pius XII, Jesuit Fathers Peter Gumpel and Robert A. Graham; it was the latter who so aptly described the Holocaust as it must have appeared to those witnessing it at the time: "What was happening had no name" (Marchione, 158).

Although in some respects her book seems to have been put together rather hastily using a variety of material collected by her, it still provides a readable and coherent account of the Pius XII controversy, including major documentation, showing that the pope did *not* collaborate with the Nazi regime; that he was *not* "silent"; that he did *not* aid in the escape of Nazi war criminals; and that he generally *did* do what he was able to do for the unfortunate victims of the Nazis, given the parlous situation that he was in himself. Any reader reading only this very honest book on the Pius XII controversy will still get a pretty good picture of what the whole thing is all about and what actually happened.

The Defamation of Pius XII (McInerny)

Ralph McInerny is a very distinguished academic: Professor of Philosophy and head of the Jacques Maritain Center at the University of Notre Dame. He is also a prolific author of both philosophical and popular works; he delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in the 1999-2000 academic year; among other popular novels, he is the author of the Father Dowling mystery series.

Since both careful scholarship and good writing are second nature to McInerny, it is not surprising to find both present in this work. In fact, it may be the most *readable* of all the Pius XII volumes under review here; at times, it is riveting.

However, it does not seem to have been the author's intention to provide yet another scholarly monograph on the Pius XII controversy in this book. Rather, as the book's title implies, it is a frankly polemical work, and, in this respect, it most resembles in *genre* the book of Garry Wills on the other side of the question: McInerny, like Wills, does not provide original research; instead, using the research of others, he aims to lay it all out as clearly and convincingly as possible. (Cornwell and Kertzer, by the way, are also quite polemical, even while claiming to be "scholarly.")

Although he uses and cites some of the standard pro-Pius material in the course of his narrative--including Jewish pro-Pius testimonials and such--McInerny seems intentionally to put aside many of the did-he-or-did-he-not questions that have characterized the Pius XII controversy. Instead, he boldly takes it for granted that no real case against Pius XII has in fact been made. He

accepts such things as Israeli writer Pinchas Lapide's figure of 700,000 to 860,000 Jews saved by the Catholic Church under the leadership of Pius XII; in fact, he relies heavily upon Lapide's work throughout; after all, he might well have reasoned, the anti-Pius writers do not refute Lapide; they simply ignore or dismiss him; until they face up to what the Church did do for the Jews, and come up with a better figure, why not employ the figure that is available?

In this perspective, it is easy to see why McNerny sees the whole Pius XII phenomenon as primarily a question of *defamation*, as his title proclaims. In what he calls an "Overture" to his book, he says:

Pius XII was a good and holy man. He was a heroic defender and protector of Jews during World War II. The evidence for this truth is massive, the testimonies are many, the facts are unchangeable. All efforts to show the opposite have been conclusively refuted. The question is *not* whether Pius XII acted heroically during World War II and was instrumental in saving hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Nazi extermination. The question is *not* whether libels and slanders against this good and holy man can be refuted. The overwhelming question that has to be addressed is this: *Why is this good man being defamed?* Who are those who devote themselves to besmirching the reputation of Pius XII? What are they really after? What is their fundamental objective? (McInerny, *xi*).

Later on, near the end of his narrative, he flatly declares: "*What Pius XII did or did not do is no longer the issue*" (McInerny, 169; italics in the original). The issue, for him, is the unprecedented slander against a revered spiritual leader which is being carried on past the point of any possible historical reason or purpose in order to serve other agendas. Among these agendas is that of those McNerny calls "Catholic anti-Catholics"; he not only severely criticizes the books of declared Catholics Cornwell and Wills under review here; he also goes after other Catholic writers critical of Pius XII such as Gordon Zahn, John F. Morley, and James Carroll (McInerny, 170-179).

He is also "dismayed" that Jewish writers should have joined in what he steadily calls the defamation of Pius XII, and he is the only writer under review here who raises questions about what certain Jewish leaders, particularly Zionists, also did not do to help save their fellow Jews--although, on the whole, he is easier on the Jewish writers than he is on the anti-Pius Catholic writers. About playwright Rolf Hochhuth, he writes:

That a former member of the Nazi *Jungvolk*, after the defeat

of Hitler, should have been filled with shame at what the Third Reich had done to Jews and others and sought to rid himself of guilt first by blaming everyone and then, out of resentment at praise for Pius XII's rescue of Jews, created the colossal fiction that Pius XII was the one chiefly responsible for what Hitler and Himmler and Eichmann had done--that is, if not forgivable, in some mad way intelligible. Therapy does take many forms...(McInerny, 170).

From his own perspective, then, Ralph McInerny comes up with a special take on the anti-Pius authors, whom he sees as having kept alive a controversy which should have been long since settled by the facts of the case:

The fact of the matter is that such attack-books are really not about Pope Pius XII at all. He is merely a target of opportunity. The real target is the Catholic Church and her unchanging moral doctrine. This is clearest in the books written by *soi-disant* Catholics. Their books express a simmering rage that the Church did not follow their false understanding of Vatican II. Their animus against Paul VI and John Paul II is every bit as great as what they feel against Pope Pius XII (McInerny, 182).

One thing is sure about this particular book: it will not fail to engage the reader of whatever persuasion, and it will most certainly not leave him indifferent.

The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965 (Phayer)

Among the various anti-Pius books under review here, this book by Michael Phayer in many respects appears to be the most genuinely serious and scholarly. He is a Professor of History at Marquette University, and the author of two previous volumes related to the Holocaust. His book is carefully written and meticulously documented. He draws on wide sources, including some of the very considerable Holocaust literature in German.

This is no crude hatchet job in the vein of John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*, then. Still, it reflects a number of the received ideas common in the anti-Pius camp: 1) that Pius XII was indeed "silent"; 2) that even when he did speak out, his words were so vague and indirect that they were not understood as specifically condemning persecution of the Jews; and 3) that Pius XII was so obsessed with Communism that he was unwilling to condemn the Nazis outright.

Generally speaking, Phayer provides no significant new evidence for these contentions; he seems to take it for granted that they are already established truths; meanwhile, much or most of what he says is based on material that has been around for a good while now. He uses the ADSS collection only sparingly.

Another feature that pervades the book is the author's steady disapproval, and even seeming personal dislike, of Pope Pius XII. Though he grudgingly gives the pope credit from time to time, it almost always seems to be a rather forced concession for him. Thus, even if the book is no crude hatchet job, it manages instead to administer a fair amount of poison in successive, small doses.

As its title makes clear, the book covers the decade before the accession of Pius XII, and extends through the twenty years following the Second World War to the close of the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council. One of the author's themes is that the pre-war and wartime anti-Semitism found among Catholics was not fully exorcised and excluded from respectability among Catholics until Vatican II enacted its Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, both strongly condemning discrimination, and exonerating the Jews as a people for any presumed guilt for the death of Christ. There is truth in this, of course, although Phayer tends to exaggerate the degree to which Catholics were, in fact, "anti-Semitic" up until *Nostra Aetate*.

Another one of his themes is summed up in a statement of his already quoted earlier, namely, that Pius XII attempted "to use a diplomatic remedy for a moral outrage." According to Phayer, as a result of this papal choice of a diplomatic rather than a moral approach, "the ethical credibility of the papacy fell to its lowest level in modern times" (Phayer, *xi*). It is pertinent to ask, though, what other effective means the pope had besides diplomatic ones? He possessed no material or military power, nor should the idea of attempting to incite Catholics to fight against the totalitarian juggernaut really have commended itself to any sensible and responsible spiritual leader in the conditions that prevailed in Nazi-occupied Europe, especially considering that the consequences for any who responded to any such papal appeal could very likely have been concentration camps or death for *them*.

It will not do simply to dismiss the explanation the pope several times quite earnestly offered for not speaking out, namely, that he did not want to make the situation *worse*. At the time, the pope could see a lot more clearly than many can apparently see today that that could well have been the likely result of any dramatic public challenge to the Nazis at the height of their power.

So Michael Phayer's proposed alternative to the diplomatic means that he deplores, then, proves to be nothing else than the same one that has fueled the Pius XII controversy from the beginning: the pope should have "spoken out." What else? In a particularly impassioned passage, he writes:

Pius XII's priorities put Jews at mortal risk. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of additional Jews would have eluded

Hitler's death camps had the Holy See accelerated rather than decelerated information about genocide. Did Pope Pius think the church so fragile that, should he speak out, it would not survive the war, even though it had survived the fratricidal Great War intact? Should the possible bombardment of Rome have been Pius's primary concern, or, as Bishop Preysing pointed out, should not the moral issue of the murder of the Jews have taken precedence? Were the churches and other structures of Rome and the Vatican really the nerve center of Catholic faith that Pius believed them to be? Was the possible future clash between Christianity and atheistic communism more important than the slaughter of the Jews who were being murdered in eastern Europe, and who would continue to be murdered, while Pius hoped for a negotiated settlement to the war that would favor genocidal Germany, the church's defender against Russian communism? (Phayer, 65).

It would be difficult to state the anti-Pius case any more clearly or strongly than this. Yet the entire paragraph rests on the initial, totally hypothetical assumption that "thousands, perhaps tens of thousands" of additional Jews would indeed have been saved, if only the pope had spoken out. Michael Phayer does not know this; nobody could know it; it is unknowable. It nevertheless provides the basis of the charges against the pope that since *The Deputy* have transformed him into a moral leper in the public mind. Yet apart from this wholly hypothetical supposition formulated years after the fact, all the other base motives attributed to the pope here for not speaking out immediately fall to the ground.

Phayer's case against the pope, then, is a completely unknowable, hypothetical case entirely removed from the possibility of any kind of empirical verification. In a very important sense this is not "history" at all; and at a certain point we really have to begin to wonder how scholars can go on year after year producing volumes such as this one about what did *not* happen in history. While it is both legitimate (and inevitable) that moral judgments will be made about the behavior of historical figures, including the popes, such judgments should be made on what they verifiably did, not on speculations about what people today think they should have done.

The evidence for the World War II period and the pope's role in it has long since been substantially in. What purpose is served to go on imagining that the pope, or anyone else in his position, was *morally obliged* to act differently than he did? There were *always* good reasons during the war for any public figure within the striking power of Hitler to be careful about what he might do or say. The pope plainly *said* that he was not going to speak out as he was urged even at the time

because he did not want to make the situation worse. He believed that, and he had good reasons for believing it. It was at least as likely that swift and ruthless Nazi retaliation would have followed any papal protest as that the Nazis would have been affected or deterred in any way by anything the pope might have said.

Nor was it simply a matter of fearing for the physical destruction of the art treasures or the churches of Rome. Rome remained the headquarters and nerve center of whatever efforts the Church was making on behalf of war victims, and for the pope to risk its destruction would have been to jeopardize that work as well as to abandon his responsibility to his own faithful.

Nor was it a matter of fearing that the Church was too fragile to survive a confrontation with Hitler; the pope had responsibilities *also* to the Catholics who were largely helpless under Hitler's sway. We have already seen that the idea that he wanted a "negotiated peace" that favored Germany will not hold up.

To give Michael Phayer credit, the three chapters following the paragraph of his just quoted are devoted to describing many of the efforts that were accomplished by Catholics working within the Church's structures. Nevertheless his careful research is vitiated by his overall unproven thesis concerning the moral failure of Pius and the Church in the face of the Holocaust. The Church had no answer for the Holocaust. Nobody did. But the Church still went on trying to be the Church to the extent possible.

A number of other things could be said about Phayer's approach to his Holocaust material. Let us take just one example: his treatment of alleged Vatican collaboration in helping Nazi war criminals escape from Europe and from justice after the war. There can be little doubt that some Nazi war criminals were able to make use of existing Church refugee machinery; nor can there be any doubt that some guilty escapees were helped by some Church officials.

One such was the Austrian bishop in Rome, Alois Hudal, who was pro-Nazi, as various sources agree; in fact, the bishop admitted it, and had even published pamphlets in favor of National Socialism. After the war, he was instrumental in helping escape such high profile fugitives as Franz Stangl, commandant of the Treblinka camp, and Adolf Eichmann, the organizer of the deportations (Phayer, 12 & 166).

The question for us here is: to what extent were this Austrian bishop's actions known to and/or approved by the Holy See? Phayer asserts that "the evidence unquestionably points to the Holy See's assistance to fleeing Nazis." What evidence? Phayer cites a number of investigators and writers. One of them *found out* from interviews with "a number of clerical and non-clerical operatives" that "Vatican money was used to pay for the escape of war crimes fugitives."

Another Red Cross worker *recalled* that "it was taken for granted" that Vatican money was being so used. "British and American secret service agents *reported* the same thing." "Other writers, working independently of each other and using different archival source material, have *asserted* that the innermost and highest circles of the Vatican (Montini and thus probably the pope himself) knew that their *appointees*, Bishop Alois Hudal and Father Krunoslav Dragonovic, were helping notorious fugitives..." (emphasis added throughout).

This is supposed to be *evidence*? *Unquestionable* evidence? It looks more like a tissue of hearsay and rumor that various people "recalled" or "reported" without any firm verification. What, for example, is even meant by "Vatican money"? As for Bishop Hudal being the pope's "appointee," the man was head of a German seminary in Rome, and was *not* directly connected with "the Vatican." Phayer adduces no hard evidence at any point that the Vatican had close relations with Bishop Hudal or wanted to do anything but keep him at arm's length (although it allowed him at least once to be used as a go-between with the German occupation authorities). Susan Zuccotti, for example, writes that "Hudal was apparently not a confidante of the pope and had little influence at the Vatican" (Zuccotti, 162).

Typically, though, Phayer describes Hudal as having "won" appointment to his minor seminary post. Also, the fact that, years before, as papal nuncio, Eugenio Pacelli had officiated at his episcopal ordination, is advanced as yet one more sinister bit of information linking the pope to this man who helped German war criminals escape--although papal nuncios, as the delegate of the pope, very commonly officiate at *all* episcopal ordinations in the countries where they are assigned.

Similarly, Bishop Hudal's successor at the college is quoted as saying that the bishop "enjoyed a close friendship" with Pius XII. Bishop Hudal, we are told, also *corresponded* with the pope's confidante, Father Robert Leiber, S.J. The bishop is said without further specification to have been *in touch with* the Vatican during the war. There is speculation about the money the German bishop used to finance his activities. Did it come from or with the knowledge of the pope? The only money transaction mentioned, however, concerned a small \$1800 grant for Austrians "forwarded" to Bishop Hudal by the Holy See.

Yet on the basis of this kind of undocumented reporting, speculation, and even gossip, Michael Phayer presumes to be able to ask the question: "Did Undersecretary of State Montini and the pope himself *assist* the escape of atrocity perpetrators to South America and other lands beyond the reach of the allies"? (emphasis added). He provides no evidence whatsoever for any such thing beyond the kind of speculation and innuendo we have just quoted; and he brushes aside an

explicit denial of any such Vatican involvement by the, after all, very knowledgeable Father Robert A. Graham, S.J. José Sánchez mentions a similar formal denial by Father Pierre Blet based on Vatican archival records (Sánchez, 171).

But Phayer simply goes on to describe in greater detail the high-level Nazis (Eichmann, *et al*) who were helped by Bishop Hudal. He then closes out this particular paragraph by quoting two other historians who assert that "if the rescue of Roman Jews could not have been accomplished without Pope Pius's 'knowledge and encouragement, tacit or explicit,' as his apologists would have it, then neither would the harboring of Nazis" (Phayer, 165-167).

But the two cases are in no way analogous, however: secretly hiding two or three escaping war criminals in a German college in Rome is a much easier thing than hiding *thousands* of Jews in Roman religious institutions where, among other things, the Church's law of cloister had to be suspended--probably only on the authority of the pope himself.

Michael Phayer goes on to discuss other cases of alleged Vatican involvement in helping war criminals escape using pretty much the same kind of "evidence." He lamely concedes at one point that "we cannot say that the pope or his Undersecretaries Montini and Tardini knew this, but they had every reason to suspect it with Hudal as their agent" (Phayer, 168).

So now this minor German seminary head becomes the "agent" of the Holy See! There are, of course, dozens of seminaries in and around Rome--precisely where many Jews were able to hide! To describe the head of one of them as the "agent" of the pope and his senior colleagues is an egregious and unsustainable claim.

This is not history. Michael Phayer certainly demonstrates at times the ability to write history, but he seems so consumed by his antecedent conviction about the moral failure of Pius XII that he is unable to manage it consistently. More could be said about this book, not all of it as bad as this. Still it cannot be said the book makes the case against the pope and the Catholic Church that it apparently sets out to make.

More than that, it is a very serious thing in the post-Holocaust climate to accuse someone of being anti-Semitic or of having helped Nazi war criminals escape. Phayer and the anti-Pius authors are going to have to do a much better job if they really expect such charges to stand.

In the end, Michael Phayer seems to be a prime example among our authors of what Michael Burleigh, in his recent *The Third Reich: A New History*, thinks is *not* needed when writing about Nazi Germany, that is, "*ex post facto*

outrage from armchair moralists..."[\[lxxx\]](#)

Hitler, the War, and the Pope (Rychlak)

This book gives the most complete and best documented account of Pius XII and the Holocaust of any of the books under review here. In fact, it is even somewhat difficult to read at times because of the frequency of the numbered end-notes contained in it; the reader has to keep turning back to the end-notes where, as likely as not, there will be found further discussion and documentation. This makes for slow going in the reading process, but the overall effect is, in the end, overwhelming: in the light of the documentation and arguments that the author has assembled here, the case against Pius XII set forth by the anti-Pius writers is simply *untenable*.

Ronald J. Rychlak is an Associate Dean and Professor of Law at the University of Mississippi School of Law, and his work sometimes reads like a lawyer's brief. This is a virtue in this kind of book. The author makes no bones that he is approaching the subject as a defense attorney would approach the case of his client. He believes that Pius XII is "not guilty" of the offenses for which he has been so widely charged since the Pius XII controversy began more than forty years ago.

Since the publication of this book, the author has been active in defending the pope in articles, reviews, talk shows, and the like. He does not see the Pius XII controversy as a debate among scholars or historians but rather as a vital public issue, the outcome of which will significantly affect our society and the standards it requires or accepts.

The book itself is systematic in its approach. The author sets the stage with brief but competent summaries on such subjects as the papacy and the world, the spread of nationalism, Hitler's rise to power, and so on. His first nine chapters deal with the pontificate of Pope Pius XI and the next and the last nine only with that of Pope Pius XII. However, since the latter was Secretary of State in the pontificate of his predecessor, and played such a major role in it, he is the dominant figure throughout the book--and it is, of course, necessary in any case to understand the role of Cardinal Pacelli in the pontificate of Pius XI, credited by most of the anti-Pius authors (except Kertzer) with being more favorable to the interests of the Jews, if his own attitude and role as pope towards the Holocaust is to be properly understood.

Rychlak's treatment of all the topics he surveys is competent, and he does not appear to have neglected any major aspect of the pope's record.

Rychlak is comfortable with the idea that Pius XII's basic diplomatic approach to the war and its consequences was the best course for him to follow. He believes that Pius did all that he could reasonably do to help the Jews while maintaining what he considered to be the Vatican's obligatory neutral stance. He also sees that the pope had significant responsibilities towards his own Church and flock worldwide which naturally took precedence in the pope's mind in considering what he should be doing and saying.

In defense attorney fashion, Rychlak includes a chapter of Questions and Answers in which he poses and attempts to answer such commonly posed questions in the Pius XII controversy as whether the pope was anti-Semitic or not, whether he was blinded by his hatred of Communism to favor the Germans, whether he was influenced by Hitler (or should have excommunicated him), or whether speaking out would have helped the Jews. He answers all these questions in the negative.

Some of the other questions he takes up include whether the pope feared Nazi or Fascist retaliation, what he knew about the Final Solution and when, and whether he was too willing to compromise to achieve peace. All of these questions rate a more nuanced response than a simple yes-or-no answer. Finally, he argues that, whatever the pope's responsibility was in the matter of the Holocaust, it was not diminished simply because others (allied leaders, the Red Cross, etc.) may have acted in the same way he did. Nor, according to him, should the pope have made statements of no practical value in the real world, but simply to maintain or enhance the position of the Holy See. He concludes this interesting chapter by summarizing the pontiff's 1939 encyclical *Summi Pontificatus* as the "real answer" to the manifold problems that beset the wartime generation.

We have already mentioned Rychlak's critique of John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*; it is included here as an epilogue. His criticisms are severe, but his points are all well taken, and the anti-Pius side needs to ponder them anew. Most of the anti-Pius writers do not specifically endorse Cornwell and his views; but as their notes and bibliographies indicate, they do apparently consider his very deficient book to be legitimate history. Rychlak has shown otherwise.

All in all, then, this is the best and most complete and accurate of all the books under review here. It is the one book most likely to give the reader of just one book on the Pius XII controversy the truest picture of what the controversy is all about. If, more than a half century later, Pius XII is today "on trial" for what he did or failed to do when confronted with the Holocaust against the Jews, the "prosecution" in the case might do well to emulate the able "defense" produced here by Ronald Rychlak, and produce its own "lawyer's brief" type of study addressing *all* of the issues--what Pius and the Church *did* do for the Jews during

the Holocaust, and not just what they allegedly did not do. If the "prosecution" is so sure of its case, it ought to be able to do this.

Pius XII and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy (Sánchez)

José M. Sánchez, a Professor of History at St. Louis University, signals at the outset that he strongly disagrees that what might be needed in the Pius XII controversy are any more "lawyer's-brief"-type of "prosecutions" or "defenses" of Pius XII. In his view, there has already been way too much of this kind of thing in the course of the controversy. He observes in his Preface that "the investigation of Pius' behavior seems more like a legal procedure than an historical examination. Most writers," he adds, "are concerned with condemning or absolving the pope...There have been few objective studies of this contentious subject..." (Sánchez, *vii*).

We have certainly seen this in the case of the books under review here: except for this book, they do neatly break down into anti- and pro-Pius works; partisanship seems to be one of the integral features of the Pius XII controversy. Since Professor Sánchez thinks that it is also "one of the great historical and moral problems of our time," though, his declared aim is to remain *au dessus de la mêlée*, and to produce a neutral, objective treatment of the controversy, which he thinks is badly needed.

He attempts to accomplish this aim by examining "the writings of the important critics and defenders" of the pope. Thus, the book is really a survey of some of the studies in the now vast literature that has been devoted to the subject, including some, but not all, of the books reviewed here.

For the most part, the author succeeds in carrying out his aim: he has produced a mostly objective concise survey of what many historians have said, pro and con, about the major issues that have characterized the Pius XII controversy. His own relative brief commentary on these various historians and writers is arranged according to topics: what Pius XII knew, what he said during and about the war, his possible anti-Semitism, his wartime diplomacy, his fear of Communism, and so on.

His own comments on all these topics are generally both judicious and sensible--he does not aim to "settle" any of the outstanding questions; rather, he wants to allow readers to make up their own minds on the basis of what the various authors he presents have said. He manages to cover a lot of ground in an admirably brief compass: this is one of the shorter and more readable volumes on the whole subject, and it is valuable in part because it does cover so much ground,

thus giving the reader a sense of the scope and complexity of the Pius XII question as it has developed in the course of such a long-standing controversy.

True to his original plan to remain above the fray, Sánchez avoids partisanship, and some of the judgments he renders are therefore deliberately mild. Time after time, though, he appears to find the pro-Pius case stronger, but he is careful not to make this too explicit.

One important area he relatively neglects--along with the anti-Pius authors--is the question of what the pope and the Church did do to help war victims, including Jews. Is this because the historians he surveys also tend to neglect this question? Sánchez himself deliberately limits himself to discussing instances where "the pope acted to protect Jews, and where he did not seize an opportunity to do so," stating that "the action or inaction of others...belong to [a] larger topic." (Sánchez, 139).

Of course, it is all very well to question, as we noted above that he does, the figure 700,00 to 860,000 Jews which Pinchas Lapide thought the Catholic Church under the leadership of Pius XII had succeeded in saving during the war. One thing that seems pretty clear, though, is that the professional historians do not seem to have even tried to come up with a better figure, even though there exist countless anecdotal accounts of Catholics helping or rescuing Jews in various times and places, as even anti-Pius authors like Phayer and Zuccotti note. Instead of recognizing that this is (or ought to be) a huge factor in judging the pros and cons of the Pius XII controversy, the professional historians have tended simply to skirt around the issue. This is an area, therefore, where the method of Sánchez of relying on what the historians have said fails.

In fact, his method fails somewhat in a larger sense as well, since in his attempt to be even-handed and impartial--while it is admirable in one sense--in the larger sense fails to come to grips with the *truth* of the whole matter.

In the Pius XII controversy, as we have noted, we are dealing not merely with a scholarly dispute among historians, but with what Professor Sánchez himself calls "one of the great historical and moral problems of our time." While claiming to be following the discipline and methods of objective scholarship and "history," however, a particular school of thought has effectively indicted, hauled into the dock, convicted, and sentenced to eternal moral obloquy a once-revered wartime spiritual leader.

We have also already noted how in today's post-Holocaust climate, the mere accusation of anti-Semitism or collaboration with the Nazis can itself be *fatal* to the reputation of anybody against whom such an accusation is lodged. This is what, in fact, has happened in the case of Pope Pius XII. His reputation has for all practical purposes been destroyed. As a matter of course today we are

being treated to numerous books, articles, television documentaries, movies, and the like which take for granted the established "guilt" of this "evil" pope.

With the entry upon the scene of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen and *The New Republic*, the Catholic Church herself is now being treated to the same kind of defamation that Pope Pius XII has already been subjected to. Ralph McNerny is not mistaken in thinking that "defamation" is the proper word that applies here; and this defamation is based squarely upon nothing else but the work of certain writers and historians, some of which is under review here, and a fair amount of which Sánchez himself surveys.

Yet when we try to go into detail into the reasons why Pius XII was supposedly such an evil and blameworthy man, as we are trying to do in this review-article, we find that the case against him is really not all that strong; indeed it is distinctly weak; we even find, as we have found, that it is very heavily based on assumptions and speculations that are very far from being proved--or sometimes even provable. The conclusion of Professor Sánchez's own book too could only really be that the case against Pius XII is not all that strong. To be sure, there remain ambiguities and difficulties in the pope's attitudes and behavior that are not all that easy to understand or clear up. But that he was an evil man "responsible" for the deaths of countless Jews?

This is *not true*. And *since* it is not true, the historians who nevertheless continue to produce material endlessly calling into question the pope's motives and behavior, and fueling the flames of the Pius XII controversy, should not go on being given a free pass. This is where the Sánchez method fails; it is *not* "objective" simply to go on saying that while this historian says this, the other historian says that; at some point a judgment has to be made about the truth of the matter, as nearly as we can discern it using historical methods.

José Sánchez, of course, does not fail to find that this particular historian has erred here, in his judgment, or that one has exaggerated there. He certainly does not endorse the errors or exaggerations that he finds, and that is all to the good, as far as it goes. But his method of polite scholarly evaluation ultimately does fail to come to grips with the main truth of the matter--or perhaps we should say, with the current Big Lie about Pope Pius XII.

Where does he stand on this? As an academic, should he be expected to take a stand? What *are* the responsibilities of a historian confronted, in effect, with a Big Lie of the magnitude of the one being regularly perpetuated today about Pius XII?

In this connection, his dismissive comments about the books by Margherita Marchione and Ronald Rychlak reviewed here do not redound to his credit

(Sánchez, *viii* & 178). Sister Marchione may be just a professor of literature and Ronald Rychlak only a law professor, and thus in his view they may not qualify as serious historians. Nevertheless, as we have seen--and as any truly "objective" judgment ought to attest--they have worked diligently and well with the historical materials available to them. They also understand that the ultimate question in the Pius XII controversy is the *truth*--precisely where Sánchez stops short and draws back.

Whatever the virtues of his own work--and we have tried to indicate some of them here--he is hardly entitled to exhibit for these non-historian defenders of Pius XII the disdain that he does exhibit for them, while sparing and giving a comparatively free pass to other "professionals in the field," some of whom he must realize *are* currently involved in the Big Lie about Pius XII.

Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit (Wills)

Garry Wills is not only a professional writer and historian, who teaches at Northwestern University; he is the winner of the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for his *Lincoln at Gettysburg*. He is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a winner of an NEH Presidential Award. He has written on a wide range of topics, and seemingly never fails to command an audience. He writes often for the leftist *New York Review of Books*.

However, it is pretty hard to imagine *this* book attracting the attention of the Pulitzer Committee. In it he aims to expose what he calls "structures of deceit" in the modern papacy. By this term Wills seems to mean the dishonesty and hypocrisy that he thinks are habitually employed by the popes and their Curia and others in their entourages to try to maintain--against the plain evidence, as he sees it--that the papacy is never wrong and is always justified in what it decides and does.

Other observers, even those disagreeing strongly with or rejecting the papacy, might not put it quite that bluntly, but Wills' tone throughout is confidently argumentative and polemical. He regularly gets away with saying things that in others would be seen as extreme, insulting, and outrageous; he gets away with this because, after all, he is speaking about his own Church "from the inside," and as a "practicing Catholic." It is doubtful that any reputable publisher would publish a book like this if Wills were *not* a practicing Catholic.

Be that as it may, we are not concerned here with his many hang-ups and quarrels with his own Church. We are concerned here merely with that part of his book that relates, directly or indirectly, to Pius XII and the Holocaust--roughly, the first of the three parts into which the book is divided, consisting of the book's first four chapters.

In the first of these chapters, he essays his own severe critique of the pontifical statement *We Remember* on the Holocaust, as well as another one on the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. Regarding the first of these two documents--and typical of *his* particular brand of "honesty"--Wills claims that the *We Remember* document denies that any Catholic priests or bishops ever helped the Nazis (Wills, 15). This is not the case, of course. Regarding the second document from Vatican II--which we might have thought or hoped represented a genuine attempt by the Church to clarify her teaching about the Jewish people and to improve relations with them--Wills instead quotes a rabbi who called the document "a unilateral pronouncement by one party which presumes to redress on its own terms a wrong which it does not admit" (Wills, 26). This quotation pretty much captures the spirit in which Wills himself sees the two documents.

In a second chapter entitled "Towards the Holocaust," he describes a draft papal encyclical commissioned by Pope Pius XI, which was supposed to serve as a solemn condemnation of anti-Semitism by the Church; but which was apparently put on the shelf by the general of Jesuits and never delivered to the pope for approval and signature (after consultation, Wills speculates, with Cardinal Pacelli--another "proof" of the latter's anti-Semitism!).

While blaming the Church for never issuing this draft encyclical formally condemning anti-Semitism, Wills at the same time sees no contradiction in quoting examples of supposed Church anti-Semitism taken *from* the text of the same draft encyclical! It never occurs to him that perhaps the draft was never issued *because* it proved inadequate and did not accurately reflect the Church's mature and considered view on the subject. The discussion essayed by Wills in this chapter about anti-Semitism in the Church and among the popes is a shorter version of the thesis expounded by David Kertzer in the book reviewed above, and now adopted by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, to the effect that anti-Semitism is actually endemic to the Catholic Church and to the popes. Wills even includes a brief account of the abduction of Edgardo Mortara. Unlike David Kertzer, though, Wills finds Pius XI to be the "good pope" trying "to back away from the Church's record"--into which, of course, he then finds that Pius XII promptly fell back (Wills, 29-45).

In his third chapter entitled "Usurping the Holocaust," Garry Wills credits the complaint that the beatification (and eventual canonization) of the Jewish philosopher and convert to Catholicism, now St. Edith Stein, was really a kind of cynical manipulation by the Church "to give Catholics a claim that the Holocaust victimized Catholics as well as Jews" (Wills, 48). Seemingly oblivious to the fact

that indiscriminate Nazi murder *did* also victimize *millions* of others besides Jews, as we noted above, Wills denies that Stein was any kind of Catholic martyr at all; according to him, she was deported to Auschwitz and gassed solely because she was Jewish.

The facts are that as a Catholic religious, though converted, Edith Stein was for a time exempt from deportation. But after the Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht publicly denounced the Nazi deportation of the Jews, this exemption for Jewish converts to Catholicism was promptly cancelled and the Nazis then rounded them all up and loaded them on trains for Auschwitz. During this particular deportation, "Protestant Jews and those of partial Jewish descent"--whose leaders had agreed *not* to denounce the deportations publicly--"were quickly released, but the Catholic Jews remained under arrest, together with approximately a thousand other Jewish prisoners."[\[lxxxii\]](#)

Thus, St. Edith Stein was martyred because she was Jewish *and* because she was Catholic. She was a legitimate martyr in the traditional Catholic understanding of the term. Garry Wills got it wrong here (one is tempted to add: again!).

Only in his fourth chapter does Garry Wills deal with Pope Pius XII as such. His treatment consists pretty much of a rehashing of some of the usual "particulars" against the pope by now familiar to us. Wills accepts them uncritically. As an illustration of the level at which this Pulitzer Prize historian is capable of operating, it should be noted that, with one sole exception, his *only* source for what he says about Pius XII is none other than--John Cornwell! (The one exception is a citation from the nearly forty-year-old--and biased--work by Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*.)

This book by Garry Wills powerfully supports the contention of those who hold that one of the principal motivations continuing to drive the whole Pius XII controversy is the need to discredit the authority of the papacy, and the Catholic Church generally, not just to "get" Pius XII (McInerny, 179).

Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy (Zuccotti)

The title of this book is taken from a report which the wartime German Ambassador to the Holy See, Ernst von Weizsäcker, sent to his government on October 17, 1943, the day after the Germans had rounded up more than twelve hundred Jews, most of whom were quickly deported to Auschwitz for execution. It is a famous incident, in part at least because Rolf Hochhuth also used it in his play *The Deputy* to re-enforce his depiction of a pope who was not even terribly

upset by Jews being rounded up "under his very windows."

Most of our authors besides Susan Zuccotti cover this incident in some detail, along with the fact of the subsequent cessation of deportations from Rome itself on the direct orders of Himmler, who either was or was not deterred by the threat of a possible public protest by the pope (Blet, 214-218; Cornwell, 302-312; Phayer, 94-104; Rychlak, 205-208; and Sánchez, 140-149). It is fascinating to note the differences in details and emphasis, depending upon the author's point of view, in these various accounts that draw on the same basic set of facts.

What the German Ambassador actually wrote in his report to his government was the following:

I can confirm the reaction of the Vatican to the removal of Jews from Rome...The Curia is dumbfounded, particularly as the action took place under the very windows of the pope, as it were (Zuccotti, Epigraph & 162).

Although she quotes the German Ambassador himself thus describing Vatican officials as "dumbfounded" over this round-up of Jews in the city of Rome, Susan Zuccotti, in keeping with her firm and steady conviction concerning the overall culpable silence and passivity of Pope Pius XII with regard to the Holocaust, nevertheless believes that the pope's "advisors, if not he himself, had *almost certainly heard rumors* that Roman Jews were to be deported several days before the actual round-up" (emphasis added).

The principal evidence she provides for this belief of hers is that a *German* official in Rome, Friedrich Möllhausen, was trying for reasons of his own to head off the coming round-up; he both sent cables to the German Foreign Office in Berlin about it and intervened with local German authorities in Rome; and, according to him, Ambassador Weizsäcker's office was supposed to have warned Vatican officials in advance, and hence, Zuccotti says, "these officials *certainly* informed the pope" (Zuccotti, 156-157; emphasis added again)--although there seems to be no further evidence that Vatican officials were in fact so informed.

This surmise that Vatican officials "certainly" informed the pope, then, is her "evidence" that the pope knew in advance that there would be a round-up. It is obviously not hard evidence but only surmise. Anyway, there is another account of the matter which even Zuccotti herself refers to, and which testifies to another very different personal papal reaction to the news of the round-up: it was not the reaction of someone who knew in advance, but one of great consternation, astonishment, and disillusionment at the news that Roman Jews were being rounded up.

An Italian princess, Enza Pignatelli Aragona, provided this other account. She was one of the first to witness the victims being loaded in trucks early in the

morning of October 16, 1943; she hastened to the Vatican, where she was known, and was admitted to the pope's private apartment, where she conveyed the news of the round-up to him. An obviously agitated pope exclaimed that he had been "promised" that the Roman Jews would not be touched. In her presence, the pope also immediately made a telephone call, it is not known to whom, although some pro-Pius authors believe it was to his Secretary of State, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, to instruct him to lodge an immediate protest with the German Ambassador.

Cardinal Maglione did, in fact, meet with Ambassador von Weizsäcker that day and asked him to intervene "in favor of these poor people." We have the memorandum of conversation of this meeting which the cardinal himself penned, although this document too has been the subject of differing interpretations--whether a possible public protest by the pope was seriously threatened, or whether the cardinal did not leave it to the ambassador's sole discretion to act in the matter as the latter saw fit. Weizsäcker's role in the affair has also been disputed, especially since, as some authors have pointed out, this German envoy is supposed to have feared that Hitler might take rash action against the Vatican if provoked; and hence his reports to Berlin were apparently often couched in language aimed at keeping Hitler calm on the subject of the Vatican.

Susan Zuccotti herself describes Cardinal Maglione's intervention with the German Ambassador "not as an official diplomatic protest of the round-up, but as a desperate plea for Weizsäcker's intervention to save the victims" (Zuccotti, 160). She even speculates about whether or not the Secretary of State had "lost his nerve"--an interpretation that would fit with the pope's own reported extremely surprised reaction to the news of the round-up; and with Ambassador von Weizsäcker's own report to Berlin that the Vatican was "dumbfounded" by it.

Thus, there is strong evidence, which Zuccotti herself helps supply, that the pope and the Vatican did *not* know in advance about the round-up of the Roman Jews. Even so, as we quoted her above, Susan Zuccotti insists that they "certainly" did know; she is sure the pope must have known; and she severely castigates him for not speaking out about it--only one of the many times she does so in the course of this book. She quite simply credits Friedrich MÖllhausen's view that Ambassador von Weizsäcker's office must have informed Vatican officials, and they, in turn, must have informed the pope; and then she goes on from there to judge that this "constitutes a terrible indictment for the Vatican...The 1,259 Jews arrested on October 16 were caught in their homes...They could not believe that the Germans would act against them under the pope's very windows. A quiet private warning to Jewish community leaders would have been passed along and believed and hundreds of lives would have been spared" (Zuccotti,

157). *It was all the pope's fault!*

We have dwelt on this one small incident, in part because Zuccotti too makes so much of it and actually takes the title of her book from it; and in part because it typifies the approach that she takes throughout the entire book. Like Michael Phayer, she starts out with the antecedent conviction of the pope's gross moral failure for not speaking out about the Holocaust, and after that nothing will do except to try to show at practically every possible turn that the pope did indeed fail morally. To achieve this goal, her method is to accept just about everything that tells against the pope, while being rigorously skeptical of any claims in his favor. There is no way, of course, that the pope, or anyone else, could ever emerge from such a process except as the stigmatized figure that Pope Pius XII is regarded as being today.

The fact that she does not really know whether the pope knew about the round-up in advance or not--any more than she really knows whether "hundreds of lives would have been spared" if only he had sounded the warning--does not seem to make any difference in her damning conclusion.

So what is the great significance of this "under his very windows" incident"? That Pope Pius XII was--again--culpably silent and passive when he knew in advance that the Roman Jews were going to be rounded up and yet failed to warn them? But she has not shown that he knew; and, as we have seen, there is other credible evidence that, very probably, he did not. Moreover, as Zuccotti herself records in an endnote (Zuccotti, 367n35), the Roman Jewish community *was* warned in advance of a possible German round-up, and by the man who was their own Chief Rabbi at the time, Israele Zolli, who himself did hide and thus survived (and who after the war converted to Catholicism, and took the name "Eugenio," it is said because of his admiration for Pius XII).

Subsequently, the Germans did not deport any more Jews from Rome itself, although it is not clear whether the Vatican intervention was the reason for that decision. In any case, as a result of the round-up of October 16, most of the Roman Jews then did flee or hide, thousands of them going into Catholic religious institutions which had been opened up for them.

Zuccotti, though, consistent with her view throughout, accords little or no credit to Pius XII for all this help given to the Roman Jews. This is unfortunate, because the book otherwise exhibits not a few real virtues: it is carefully, even meticulously researched and documented; it is lucidly written; the author makes extensive use of the ADSS collection; and she documents numerous cases all over Italy where Jews were helped by Catholics. In the end, though, she always comes back to the fact that, in her view, the pope simply "did not speak out publicly against the destruction of the Jews" (Zuccotti, 1).

Moreover, in the two instances where she admits that the pope made public reference to people who were being killed because of the national or ethnic origins--Pius XII's 1942 Christmas Message and his June, 1943, Address to the Cardinals--she claims that he never "used the words Jew, anti-Semitism, or race." She tries to validate this claim by asserting that the pope's use of the Italian word *stirpe*, which some translators of these speeches render as "race," really does not mean that at all, but really means only "descent" (Zuccotti, 1). In an endnote, she is sharply critical of several Pius XII defenders for presuming to think that *stirpe* could mean "race" (Zuccotti, 329n3).

This is a very significant point for her. She returns to it several times in the course of the book (Zuccotti, 16, 159, 163 & 164-165): for her the pope, culpably, not only never used the word "Jew"; he never even used the word "race"! This seems unforgivable to her.

However, my Cassell's *Italian Dictionary*, published in 1979, gives the following as the definition of the Italian *stirpe*: "stock, race, descent, lineage, extraction" (emphasis added). The *Zanichelli New College Italian and English Dictionary*, again, gives: "stock, race, family, lineage, ancestry"--and does *not* give "descent." My old Italian *Novo Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, published in Milan in 1924 (and thus perhaps reflects Italian usage when Eugenio Pacelli was a young man) gives *schiatte*, "race," as an exact synonym of *stirpe*; and, interestingly enough, also gives as an illustration of the word's meaning the phrase, *la stirpe semitica*, "the Semitic race"!

It is impossible not to ask what Susan Zuccotti's problem is here, pursuing such a minor point at such length? The word "obsession" almost inevitably suggests itself.

And speaking of obsessions, there is also her steady insistence that Pius XII is not to be credited with any action, initiative, or intervention unless she can find written, documentary evidence for it--which she generally does not find. Although she herself is willing to assert without any documentary evidence that the pope must "certainly" have known in advance about the round-up of the Roman Jews, as we saw, her standards become much more stringent when it is a question of giving the pope or the Vatican any credit for help extended to the Jews. As she concludes in one place (and in too many others to mention!): "Had such an intervention occurred, there would surely have been a document on the subject" (Zuccotti, 71).

Even today it is doubtful that an interested researcher would find specific "documents" or "orders" directly from the pope, say, in the average Catholic diocese or parish, yet few would doubt the influence and the authority of the pope

in such places. And it seems more than likely that the pope as head of the Church in wartime Italy would have been involved in numerous affairs where he would *not* want to have "documented" in a way that could come into the hands of the Germans exactly what he and the Church he headed might be up to. This would seem to be especially true of operations involving the taking in and hiding of *thousands* of Jewish refugees in seminaries and convents and similar Church institutions.

Yet in the absence of specific documentation or written "orders" issued by the pope, Zuccotti declines to give him or his Vatican colleagues any credit for helping the eighty-five percent of Italian Jews who fortunately escaped the Holocaust--one of the best records in Europe.

V.

The ten books reviewed here would seem to demonstrate that the long Pius XII controversy is still at high tide and unlikely to recede any time soon. This is too bad. There is very little new in any of these books that has not been available for a good while now. These contemporary authors are often just going back over material that goes all the way back to the first phase of the controversy in the 1960s, and we are thus scarcely any further along now than we were more than two decades ago, when Michael O'Carroll was "answering" authors such as Guenter Lewy and Saul Friedländer.

The same thing is true of periodical articles on the topic such as *Commentary* magazine's most recent contribution to the debate. Since a rabbi, David G. Dalin, had been so prominently featured defending Pius XII in the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*, nothing would do for *Commentary*, apparently, than to feature in its pages a Catholic historian from the Harvard Divinity School, Kevin Madigan, with an article about "What the Vatican Knew About the Holocaust, and When."[\[lxxxii\]](#) While his article is careful, nuanced, and moderate--and while, again, the journal provided ample space for rebuttals[\[lxxxiii\]](#)--the premise of the article still rests on the same old original Hochhuth contention that *if* the pope knew, then he necessarily *had* to "speak out." As we have seen, the strict necessity of this is far from having been shown in the course of the debate; indeed the pro-Pius authors have provided plausible if not cogent reasons why speaking out was very probably not the appropriate policy; the anti-Pius authors just decline to credit these reasons. At the end of his article, Kevin Madigan himself falls back on citing such books to clinch his case as those of Guenter Lewy, Michael Phayer, and Susan Zuccotti. The Pope Pius XII controversy simply goes on, then, and we never seem to arrive at any

conclusions that everybody can accept.

Not even the publication of the twelve volumes of actual Vatican wartime documents in the ADSS collection seems to have brought the question any closer to settlement--anymore than the opening to scholars of the rest of the Vatican archives for the period is likely to do so. Whatever new is found there will probably only be used to further the controversy along the same lines as before.

As we have seen in the case of the books reviewed here, though, the anti-Pius authors are far from having conclusively "proved" that Pius XII was culpably silent and passive in the face of the Holocaust against the Jews; at the same time, of course, the pro-Pius authors have not succeeded in laying to rest all of the many questions that have been raised about the wartime pope. In the nature of the case, then, it seems unlikely that either side will ever be able to find the kind of "evidence" that could ever definitively "settle" the question in the mind of the other side.

In the meantime, though, as we have more than once remarked, we are dealing here with a question that goes far beyond any mere debate or dispute among historians. We are dealing with what has quite clearly been shown in the course of this review-article to be the unjust defamation of a major historical figure. In a different world, it might have been possible to disagree, even strongly, with the decision of Pope Pius XII to employ diplomatic rather than prophetic means in trying to guide his Church through the perilous waters of World War II and the Holocaust without ending up with the actual defamation and discrediting of the man. Perhaps a better or more effective course of action was available to him. The Catholic Church certainly claims no "infallibility" for the prudential and practical judgments made by the popes. But we are not dealing here with such mere disagreements about how the pope spoke and acted.

We are dealing with how his speech and actions, such as they were, have caused him to be placed in virtually the same category as the Nazis who carried out the Holocaust as well as to be considered a moral leper and labeled an evil man. Although people today generally tend to be chary when speaking of "evil," and get nervous when a President Bush dares to speak of an "axis of evil" (as they used to get nervous when President Ronald Reagan spoke of the now defunct Soviet "evil empire"), this does not seem to apply where the Nazis are concerned. Everybody agrees that the Nazis were evil, and hence it is apparently also fair to characterize as evil anybody thought to be "associated" with them, however tenuously. Even though the association in question has not been established--rather, the contrary has been established--it is still widely considered quite legitimate and natural to label Pius XII as evil simply because he has been *accused* of favoring the Nazis: if he did not come out strongly enough against them, then

he must somehow have been for them.

This is the view of him that, in fact, emerges not only from the polemical works by disaffected Catholics such as Cornwell and Wills reviewed here; it emerges also from the books with greater claims to scholarship such as those by Kertzer, Phayer, and Zuccotti; although their books are not as shoddily researched and written as those by Cornwell and Wills, they are every bit as agenda-driven by the animus of these authors against their subject(s).

No doubt these authors sincerely believe that they are merely trying to get at the truth, but this does not make their books any less agenda-driven. The fact of the matter is that they have *not* made their case, as has been shown; nor, in the light of the material brought out in all these books, does it seem likely that they *can* make their case; what they are contending about Pius XII is not true, and is never likely to be shown as true.

Meanwhile, however, the reputation of the pope nevertheless continues to get further blackened. Even striving to be nuanced and moderate, a Kevin Madigan can conclude in *Commentary*: "Not 'Hitler's Pope,' then, let alone a force for demonic evil...but neither 'a great and saintly man (Peter Gumpel)' or a force for individual or institutional heroism." Yet this still places Pius XII in the same *category* as "Hitler's Pope," as do all of the anti-Pius authors reviewed here, who scarcely even try to be nuanced and moderate.

What all these writers are engaged in, whether they like it or not, in the atmosphere now long since created by the forty-year-old Pius XII controversy--is the perpetuation of a Big Lie. They almost inevitably remind us of George Santayana's famous definition of a "fanatic," namely, one who redoubles his effort after he has forgotten his aim. That is about where these authors are.

Then there is Daniel Jonah Goldhagen and *The New Republic* claiming to base *their* case against the whole Catholic Church as anti-Semitic and as culpable as Pius XII on these very same (and similar) books. But since these books have not made their own case, they cannot credibly support Goldhagen's. His contention that the great historical wrong done to the Jews stems from the anti-Semitism that is supposedly an integral part of and is fostered by the Catholic Church resembles nothing so much as the Nazi ideology which made the Jews responsible for all the evils which beset Germany after World War I. When we encounter this kind of thing, we are no longer just talking about "history"; we are, truly, into a Big Lie.

It is not possible to say where the Pius XII controversy is going to go from here, but it is not likely that its future course is going to be very positive. We have come a long way from the bitter musings of the young leftist ex-Hitler youth who

successfully fastened upon Pius XII the role of scapegoat by means of his vulgar stage play. How Hochhuth's thesis in *The Deputy* ever came to be so widely credited and believed and even taken for granted remains mysterious; but there is no doubt that it is very much with us still.

Yet when we look at standard biographies and studies of Pope Pius XII published before the era of the *Deputy*, we get no hint whatsoever that Pius XII was anything but a selfless and courageous man trying to lead his Church in very trying times. [\[lxxxiv\]](#) In a book published by *New York Herald Tribune* European correspondent Barrett McGurn in 1962, for example, on the very eve of *The Deputy*, there is actually a chapter entitled "Pius the Great"? [\[lxxxv\]](#) This chapter title was worded as a question, of course, but it *was* a question that was posed very seriously by serious observers at the time, just as people say the same thing about Pope John Paul II today. This *was* the regard in which Pius was held before what Ralph McInerny calls the defamation of him began. The wartime and post-war outpourings of praise from Jewish leaders which the pro-Pius authors so much like to quote were typical of these pre-*Deputy* days.

Similarly, when we look at standard histories of World War II and the Third Reich, we find no sense of anything resembling the idea of a "Hitler's pope." In his massive recent *The Third Reich: A New History*, for example, which we have already quoted several times in this review-article, Michael Burleigh mentions Pius XII exactly three times, all of them favorably: Pius's condemnation of the Nazi euthanasia program in December, 1940; Pius as the recipient of information from a Ukrainian Catholic archbishop on Nazi atrocities; and in connection with the Vatican Concordat with Germany, when he denied that such an agreement implied any sympathy with Nazi ideology. [\[lxxxvi\]](#)

William L. Shirer, in his now classic *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in his 1000-plus pages refers to Pope Pius XII (or Cardinal Pacelli) only six times: once in connection with Nazi violations of the Concordat; once in connection with the pope's radio appeal for peace in August, 1939; three times with regard to the pope's various efforts to mediate a peace between the belligerents; and, finally, one later reference to the pope's peace-making efforts. [\[lxxxvii\]](#) These standard histories with no axe to grind contain no hint of the animus against the pope regularly found in the hothouse atmosphere of the current anti-Pius literature.

Then there are standard histories of the Holocaust itself such as Martin Gilbert's recent *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust*. This book, again, seems to indicate how relatively peripheral to the terrible carnage of the Holocaust were *any* words or acts of the pope in Rome, himself an unwilling "prisoner in the

Vatican" all the while. Gilbert mentions the popes only twice in his entire book: he first mentions and quotes the statement of Pope Pius XI that "spiritually we are Semites"; and the only other mention he makes of a pope, amazingly enough, is in the account he gives of Susan Zuccotti's favorite "under his very windows" incident. Gilbert's version is worth quoting in full:

On 16 October, 1943, the Germans searched Rome for the Jews of the city--more than 7000--to be deported. A few days before the search, Pope Pius XII had personally ordered the Vatican clergy to open the sanctuaries of the Vatican to all "non-Aryans" in need of refuge: 477 Jews were given shelter in the Vatican itself and in its sovereign enclaves in Rome; a further 4,238 Jews were given sanctuary in more than a hundred monasteries, convents, and Church institutions throughout Rome.

On the morning of October 16, when the round-up began, 5,615 of Rome's Jews could not be found. The 1,015 whom the Germans did discover were deported. The Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Maglione, then asked for a meeting with the German military commander in Rome, General Stahel. After the meeting, Stahel sent a message to Himmler, warning that any further round-up of Jews in Rome would disturb Stahel's military plans to re-enforce the German troops fighting the Allies in Southern Italy. Himmler thereupon ordered a halt to the deportations. [\[lxxxviii\]](#)

This account differs in a couple of details from the one above which we took primarily from Zuccotti. The numbers are slightly different. Cardinal Maglione met with the German Ambassador not with General Stahel. But the real point and proper perspective of the whole incident comes through here: to the extent that Pius XII and the Vatican were involved in the Holocaust, they were involved in trying to help, not in trying to aid and abet, or even to condone.

When we read these standard histories of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, we can scarcely recognize the pope to be the same man--or the war to be the same war, for that matter--that we find in the specialized Pius XII books that we have been looking at. There is, after all, something terribly contrived and unnatural in the whole Pius XII controversy these fifty years and more after the pontiff's actual wartime words and acts. Clearly there are other agendas at work than the normal aim of the historian to get at the truth. And it is high time for historians working in the field to begin to recognize and expose these extraneous agendas.

While the Holocaust against the Jews cannot and should not ever be forgotten, it should also be recalled that this same Holocaust was most emphatically *not* conceived and executed by the Catholic Church and Pope Pius XII, but by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

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[xviii]. See *Origins: CNS Documentary Service*, August 16, 2001.

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- [[xxi](#)]. "Vatican to Open Nazi-Era Archives," in *The Washington Post*, February 16, 2002, p.B9.
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