

## Pius XII and the Jews

By David G. Dalin

Even before Pius XII died in 1958, the charge that his papacy had been friendly to the Nazis was circulating in Europe, a piece of standard Communist agitprop against the West.

It sank for a few years under the flood of tributes, from Jews and gentiles alike, that followed the pope's death, only to bubble up again with the 1963 debut of *The Deputy*, a play by a left-wing German writer (and former member of the Hitler Youth) named Rolf Hochhuth.

*The Deputy* was fictional and highly polemical, claiming that Pius XII's concern for Vatican finances left him indifferent to the destruction of European Jewry. But Hochhuth's seven-hour play nonetheless received considerable notice, sparking a controversy that lasted through the 1960s. And now, more than thirty years later, that controversy has suddenly broken out again, for reasons not immediately clear.

Indeed, "broken out" doesn't describe the current torrent. In the last eighteen months, nine books that treat Pius XII have appeared: John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*, Pierre Blet's *Pius XII and the Second World War*, Garry Wills's *Papal Sin*, Margherita Marchione's *Pope Pius XII*, Ronald J. Rychlak's *Hitler, the War and the Pope*, Michael Phayer's *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*, Susan Zuccotti's *Under His Very Windows*, Ralph McNerny's *The Defamation of Pius XII*, and, most recently, James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword*.

Since four of these—the ones by Blet, Marchione, Rychlak, and McNerny—are defenses of the pope (and two, the books by Wills and Carroll, take up Pius only as part of a broad attack against Catholicism), the picture may look balanced. In fact, to read all nine is to conclude that Pius's defenders have the stronger case—with Rychlak's *Hitler, the War and the Pope* the best and most careful of the recent works, an elegant tome of serious, critical scholarship.

Still, it is the books vilifying the pope that have received most of the attention, particularly *Hitler's Pope*, a widely reviewed volume marketed with the announcement that Pius XII was "the most dangerous churchman in modern history," without whom "Hitler might never have . . . been able to press forward." The "silence" of the pope is becoming more and more firmly established as settled opinion in the American media: "Pius XII's elevation of Catholic self-interest over Catholic conscience was the lowest point in modern Catholic history," the *New York Times* remarked, almost in passing, in a review last month of Carroll's *Constantine's Sword*.

Curiously, nearly everyone pressing this line today—from the ex-seminarians John Cornwell and Garry Wills to the ex-priest James Carroll—is a lapsed or angry Catholic.

For Jewish leaders of a previous generation, the campaign against Pius XII would have been a source of shock. During and after the war, many well-known Jews—Albert Einstein, Golda Meir, Moshe Sharett, Rabbi Isaac Herzog, and innumerable others—publicly expressed their gratitude to Pius. In his 1967 book *Three Popes and the Jews*, the diplomat Pinchas Lapide (who served as Israeli consul in Milan and interviewed Italian Holocaust survivors) declared Pius XII "was instrumental in saving at least 700,000, but probably as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands."

This is not to say that Eugenio Pacelli—the powerful churchman who served as nuncio in Bavaria and Germany from 1917 to 1929, then as Vatican secretary of state from 1930 to 1939, before becoming Pope Pius XII six months before World War II began—was as much a friend to the Jews as John Paul II has been. Nor is it to say that Pius was ultimately successful as a defender of Jews. Despite his desperate efforts to maintain peace, the war came, and, despite his protests against German atrocities, the slaughter of the Holocaust occurred. Even without benefit of hindsight, a careful study reveals that the Catholic Church missed opportunities to influence events, failed to credit fully the Nazis' intentions, and was infected in some of its members with a casual anti-Semitism that would countenance—and, in a few horrifying instances, affirm—the Nazi ideology. But to make Pius XII a target of our moral outrage against the Nazis, and to count Catholicism among the institutions delegitimized by the horror of the Holocaust, reveals a failure of historical understanding. Almost none of the recent 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.

A theological debate about the future of the papacy is obviously something in which non-Catholics should not involve themselves too deeply. But Jews, whatever their feelings about the Catholic Church, have a duty to reject any attempt to usurp the Holocaust and use it for partisan purposes in such a debate—particularly when the attempt disparages the testimony of Holocaust survivors and spreads to inappropriate figures the condemnation that belongs to Hitler and the Nazis.

The technique for recent attacks on Pius XII is simple. It requires only that favorable evidence be read in the worst light and treated to the strictest test, while unfavorable evidence is read in the best light and treated to no test.

So, for instance, when Cornwell sets out in *Hitler's Pope* to prove Pius an anti-Semite (an accusation even the pontiff's bitterest opponents have rarely leveled), he makes much of Pacelli's reference in a 1917 letter to the "Jewish cult"—as though for an Italian Catholic prelate born in 1876 the word "cult" had the same resonances it has in English today, and as though Cornwell himself does not casually refer to the Catholic cult of the Assumption and the cult of the Virgin Mary. (The most immediately helpful part of *Hitler, the War and the Pope* may be the thirty-page epilogue Rychlak devotes to demolishing this kind of argument in *Hitler's Pope*.)

The same pattern is played out in Susan Zuccotti's *Under His Very Windows*. For example: There exists testimony from a Good Samaritan priest that Bishop Giuseppe Nicolini of Assisi, holding a letter in his hand, declared that the pope had written to request help for Jews during the German roundup of Italian Jews in 1943. But because the priest did not actually read the letter, Zuccotti speculates that the bishop may have been deceiving him—and thus that this testimony should be rejected.

Compare this skeptical approach to evidence with her treatment, for example, of a 1967 interview in which the German diplomat Eitel F. Mollhausen said he had sent information to the Nazis' ambassador to the Vatican, Ernst von Weizsäcker, and "assumed" that Weizsäcker passed it on to Church "officials." Zuccotti takes this as unquestionable proof that the pope had direct foreknowledge of the German roundup. (A fair reading suggests Pius had heard rumors and raised them with the Nazi occupiers. Princess Enza Pignatelli Aragona reported that when she broke in on the pope with the news of the roundup early on the morning of October 16, 1943, his first words were: "But the Germans had promised not to touch the Jews!")

With this dual standard, recent writers have little trouble arriving at two pre-ordained conclusions. The first is that the Catholic Church must shoulder the blame for the Holocaust: "Pius XII was the most guilty," as Zuccotti puts it. And the second is that Catholicism's guilt is due to aspects of the Church that John Paul II now represents.

Indeed, in the concluding chapter of *Hitler's Pope* and throughout *Papal Sin* and *Constantine's Sword*, the parallel comes clear: John Paul's traditionalism is of a piece with Pius's alleged anti-Semitism; the Vatican's current stand on papal authority is in a direct line with complicity in the Nazis' extermination of the Jews. Faced with such monstrous moral equivalence and misuse of the Holocaust, how can we not object?

It is true that during the controversy over *The Deputy* and again during the Vatican's slow hearing of the case for his canonization (ongoing since 1965), Pius had Jewish detractors. In 1964, for example, Guenter Lewy produced *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, and, in 1966, Saul Friedländer added *Pius XII and the Third Reich*. Both volumes claimed that Pius's anti-communism led him to support Hitler as a bulwark against the Russians.

As accurate information on Soviet atrocities has mounted since 1989, an obsession with Stalinism seems less foolish than it may have in the mid-1960s. But, in fact, the evidence has mounted as well that Pius accurately ranked the threats. In 1942, for example, he told a visitor, "The Communist danger does exist, but at this time the Nazi danger is more serious." He intervened with the American bishops to support lend-lease for the Soviets, and he explicitly refused to bless the Nazi invasion of Russia. (The charge of overheated anti-communism is nonetheless still alive: In *Constantine's Sword*, James Carroll attacks the 1933 concordat Hitler signed for Germany by asking, "Is it conceivable that Pacelli would have negotiated any such agreement with the Bolsheviks in Moscow?"—apparently not realizing that in the mid-1920s, Pacelli tried exactly that.)

In any case, Pius had his Jewish defenders as well. In addition to Lapid's *Three Popes and the Jews*, one might list *A Question of Judgment*, the 1963 pamphlet from the Anti-Defamation League's Joseph Lichten, and the excoriating reviews of Friedländer by Livia Rotkirchen, the historian of Slovakian Jewry at Yad Vashem. Jeno Levai, the great Hungarian historian, was so angered by accusations of papal silence that he wrote *Pius XII Was Not Silent* (published in English in 1968), with a powerful introduction by Robert M.W. Kempner, deputy chief U.S. prosecutor at Nuremberg.

In response to the new attacks on Pius, several Jewish scholars have spoken out over the last year. Sir Martin Gilbert told an interviewer that Pius deserves not blame but thanks. Michael Tagliacozzo, the leading authority on Roman Jews during the Holocaust, added, "I have a folder on my table in Israel entitled 'Calumnies Against Pius XII.' . . . Without him, many of our own would not be alive." Richard Breitman (the only historian authorized to study U.S. espionage files from World War II) noted that secret documents prove the extent to which "Hitler distrusted the Holy See because it hid Jews."

Still, Lapid's 1967 book remains the most influential work by a Jew on the topic, and in the thirty-four years since he wrote, much material has become available in the Vatican's archives and elsewhere. New oral-history centers have gathered an impressive body of interviews with Holocaust survivors, military chaplains, and Catholic civilians. Given the recent attacks, the time has come for a new defense of Pius—because, despite allegations to the contrary, the best historical evidence now confirms both that Pius XII was not silent and that almost no one at the time thought him so.

In January 1940, for instance, the pope issued instructions for Vatican Radio to reveal "the dreadful cruelties of uncivilized tyranny" the Nazis were inflicting on Jewish and Catholic Poles. Reporting the broadcast the following week, the *Jewish Advocate* of Boston praised it for what it was: an "outspoken denunciation of German atrocities in Nazi Poland, declaring they affronted the moral conscience of mankind." The *New York Times* editorialized: "Now the Vatican has spoken, with authority that cannot be questioned, and has confirmed the worst intimations of terror which have come out of the Polish darkness." In England, the Manchester Guardian hailed Vatican Radio as "tortured Poland's most powerful advocate."

Any fair and thorough reading of the evidence demonstrates that Pius XII was a persistent critic of Nazism. Consider just a few highlights of his opposition before the war:

Of the forty-four speeches Pacelli gave in Germany as papal nuncio between 1917 and 1929, forty denounced some aspect of the emerging Nazi ideology.

In March 1935, he wrote an open letter to the bishop of Cologne calling the Nazis "false prophets with the pride of Lucifer."

That same year, he assailed ideologies "possessed by the superstition of race and blood" to an enormous crowd of pilgrims at Lourdes. At Notre Dame in Paris two years later, he

named Germany "that noble and powerful nation whom bad shepherds would lead astray into an ideology of race."

The Nazis were "diabolical," he told friends privately. Hitler "is completely obsessed," he said to his long-time secretary, Sister Pascalina. "All that is not of use to him, he destroys; . . . this man is capable of trampling on corpses." Meeting in 1935 with the heroic anti-Nazi Dietrich von Hildebrand, he declared, "There can be no possible reconciliation" between Christianity and Nazi racism; they were like "fire and water."

The year after Pacelli became secretary of state in 1930, Vatican Radio was established, essentially under his control. The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* had an uneven record, though it would improve as Pacelli gradually took charge (extensively reporting *Kristallnacht* in 1938, for example). But the radio station was always good—making such controversial broadcasts as the request that listeners pray for the persecuted Jews in Germany after the 1935 Nuremberg Legislation.

It was while Pacelli was his predecessor's chief adviser that Pius XI made the famous statement to a group of Belgian pilgrims in 1938 that "anti-Semitism is inadmissible; spiritually we are all Semites." And it was Pacelli who drafted Pius XI's encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, "With Burning Concern," a condemnation of Germany among the harshest ever issued by the Holy See. Indeed, throughout the 1930s, Pacelli was widely lampooned in the Nazi press as Pius XI's "Jew-loving" cardinal, because of the more than fifty-five protests he sent the Germans as the Vatican secretary of state.

To these must be added highlights of Pius XII's actions during the war:

His first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, rushed out in 1939 to beg for peace, was in part a declaration that the proper role of the papacy was to plead to both warring sides rather than to blame one. But it very pointedly quoted St. Paul—"there is neither Gentile nor Jew"—using the word "Jew" specifically in the context of rejecting racial ideology. The *New York Times* greeted the encyclical with a front-page headline on October 28, 1939: "Pope Condemns Dictators, Treaty Violators, Racism." Allied airplanes dropped thousands of copies on Germany in an effort to raise anti-Nazi sentiment.

In 1939 and 1940, Pius acted as a secret intermediary between the German plotters against Hitler and the British. He would similarly risk warning the Allies about the impending German invasions of Holland, Belgium, and France.

In March 1940, Pius granted an audience to Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister and the only high-ranking Nazi to bother visiting the Vatican. The Germans' understanding of Pius's position, at least, was clear: Ribbentrop chastised the pope for siding with the Allies. Whereupon Pius began reading from a long list of German atrocities. "In the burning words he spoke to Herr Ribbentrop," the *New York Times* reported on March 14, Pius "came to the defense of Jews in Germany and Poland."

When French bishops issued pastoral letters in 1942 attacking deportations, Pius sent his nuncio to protest to the Vichy government against "the inhuman arrests and deportations of Jews from the French-occupied zone to Silesia and parts of Russia." Vatican Radio commented on the bishops' letters six days in a row—at a time when listening to Vatican Radio was a crime in Germany and Poland for which some were put to death. ("Pope Is Said to Plead for Jews Listed for Removal from France," the *New York Times* headline read on August 6, 1942. "Vichy Seizes Jews; Pope Pius Ignored," the *Times* reported three weeks later.) In retaliation, in the fall of 1942, Goebbels's office distributed ten million copies of a pamphlet naming Pius XII as the "pro-Jewish pope" and explicitly citing his interventions in France.

In the summer of 1944, after the liberation of Rome but before the war's end, Pius told a group of Roman Jews who had come to thank him for his protection: "For centuries, Jews have been unjustly treated and despised. It is time they were treated with justice and humanity, God wills it and the Church wills it. St. Paul tells us that the Jews are our brothers. They should also be welcomed as friends."

As these and hundreds of other examples are disparaged, one by one, in recent books attacking Pius XII, the reader loses sight of the huge bulk of them, their cumulative effect that left no one, the Nazis least of all, in doubt about the pope's position.

A deeper examination reveals the consistent pattern. Writers like Cornwell and Zuccotti see the pope's 1941 Christmas address, for example, as notable primarily for its failure to use the language we would use today. But contemporary observers thought it quite explicit. In its editorial the following day, the *New York Times* declared, "The voice of Pius XII is a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe this Christmas. . . . In calling for a 'real new order' based on 'liberty, justice, and love,' . . . the pope put himself squarely against Hitlerism."

So, too, the pope's Christmas message the following year—in which he expressed his concern "for those hundreds of thousands who, without any fault of their own, sometimes only by reason of their nationality or race, are marked down for death or progressive extinction"—was widely understood to be a public condemnation of the Nazi extermination of the Jews. Indeed, the Germans themselves saw it as such: "His speech is one long attack on everything we stand for. . . . He is clearly speaking on behalf of the Jews. . . . He is virtually accusing the German people of injustice toward the Jews, and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals," an internal Nazi analysis reads.

This Nazi awareness, moreover, had potentially dire consequences. There were ample precedents for the pope to fear an invasion: Napoleon had besieged the Vatican in 1809, capturing Pius VII at bayonet point; Pius IX fled Rome for his

life after the assassination of his chancellor; and Leo XIII was driven into temporary exile in the late nineteenth century.

Still, Pius XII was "ready to let himself be deported to a concentration camp, rather than do anything against his conscience," Mussolini's foreign minister railed. Hitler spoke openly of entering the Vatican to "pack up that whole whoring rabble," and Pius knew of the various Nazi plans to kidnap him. Ernst von Weizsäcker has written that he regularly warned Vatican officials against provoking Berlin. The Nazi ambassador to Italy, Rudolf Rahn, similarly describes one of Hitler's kidnapping plots and the effort by German diplomats to prevent it. General Carlo Wolff testified to having received orders from Hitler in 1943 to "occupy as soon as possible the Vatican and Vatican City, secure the archives and the art treasures, which have a unique value, and transfer the pope, together with the Curia, for their protection, so that they cannot fall into the hands of the Allies and exert a political influence." Early in December 1943, Wolff managed to talk Hitler out of the plan.

In assessing what actions Pius XII might have taken, many (I among them) wish that explicit excommunications had been announced. The Catholic-born Nazis had already incurred automatic excommunication, for everything from failure to attend Mass to unconfessed murder to public repudiation of Christianity. And, as his writings and table-talk make clear, Hitler had ceased to consider himself a Catholic—indeed, considered himself an anti-Catholic—long before he came to power. But a papal declaration of excommunication might have done some good.

Then again, it might not. Don Luigi Sturzo, founder of the Christian Democratic movement in wartime Italy, pointed out that the last times "a nominal excommunication was pronounced against a head of state," neither Queen Elizabeth I nor Napoleon had changed policy. And there is reason to believe provocation would, as Margherita Marchione puts it, "have resulted in violent retaliation, the loss of many more Jewish lives, especially those then under the protection of the Church, and an intensification of the persecution of Catholics."

Holocaust survivors such as Marcus Melchior, the chief rabbi of Denmark, argued that "if the pope had spoken out, Hitler would probably have massacred more than six million Jews and perhaps ten times ten million Catholics, if he had the power to do so." Robert M.W. Kempner called upon his experience at the Nuremberg trials to say (in a letter to the editor after *Commentary* published an excerpt from Guenter Lewy in 1964), "Every propaganda move of the Catholic Church against Hitler's Reich would have been not only 'provoking suicide,' . . . but would have hastened the execution of still more Jews and priests."

This is hardly a speculative concern. A Dutch bishops' pastoral letter condemning "the unmerciful and unjust treatment meted out to Jews" was read in Holland's Catholic churches in July 1942. The well-intentioned letter—which declared that it was inspired by Pius XII—backfired. As Pinchas Lapide notes: "The saddest

and most thought-provoking conclusion is that whilst the Catholic clergy in Holland protested more loudly, expressly, and frequently against Jewish persecutions than the religious hierarchy of any other Nazi-occupied country, more Jews—some 110,000 or 79 percent of the total—were deported from Holland to death camps."

Bishop Jean Bernard of Luxembourg, an inmate of Dachau from 1941 to 1942, notified the Vatican that "whenever protests were made, treatment of prisoners worsened immediately." Late in 1942, Archbishop Sapieha of Cracow and two other Polish bishops, having experienced the Nazis' savage reprisals, begged Pius not to publish his letters about conditions in Poland. Even Susan Zuccotti admits that in the case of the Roman Jews the pope "might well have been influenced by a concern for Jews in hiding and for their Catholic protectors."

One might ask, of course, what could have been worse than the mass murder of six million Jews? The answer is the slaughter of hundreds of thousands more. And it was toward saving those it could that the Vatican worked. The fate of Italian Jews has become a major topic of Pius's critics, the failure of Catholicism at its home supposedly demonstrating the hypocrisy of any modern papal claim to moral authority. (Notice, for example, Zuccotti's title: *Under His Very Windows*.) But the fact remains that while approximately 80 percent of European Jews perished during World War II, 80 percent of Italian Jews were saved.

In the months Rome was under German occupation, Pius XII instructed Italy's clergy to save lives by all means. (A neglected source for Pius's actions during this time is the 1965 memoir *But for the Grace of God*, by Monsignor J. Patrick Carroll-Abbing, who worked under Pius as a rescuer.) Beginning in October 1943, Pius asked churches and convents throughout Italy to shelter Jews. As a result—and despite the fact that Mussolini and the Fascists yielded to Hitler's demand for deportations—many Italian Catholics defied the German orders.

In Rome, 155 convents and monasteries sheltered some five thousand Jews. At least three thousand found refuge at the pope's summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. Sixty Jews lived for nine months at the Gregorian University, and many were sheltered in the cellar of the pontifical biblical institute. Hundreds found sanctuary within the Vatican itself. Following Pius's instructions, individual Italian priests, monks, nuns, cardinals, and bishops were instrumental in preserving thousands of Jewish lives. Cardinal Boetto of Genoa saved at least eight hundred. The bishop of Assisi hid three hundred Jews for over two years. The bishop of Campagna and two of his relatives saved 961 more in Fiume.

Cardinal Pietro Palazzini, then assistant vice rector of the Seminario Romano, hid Michael Tagliacozzo and other Italian Jews at the seminary (which was Vatican property) for several months in 1943 and 1944. In 1985, Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial, honored the cardinal as a righteous gentile—and, in accepting the honor, Palazzini stressed that "the merit is entirely Pius XII's, who



ordered us to do whatever we could to save the Jews from persecution." Some of the laity helped as well, and, in their testimony afterwards, consistently attributed their inspiration to the pope.

Again, the most eloquent testimony is the Nazis' own. Fascist documents published in 1998 (and summarized in Marchione's *Pope Pius XII*) speak of a German plan, dubbed "Rabat-Fohn," to be executed in January 1944. The plan called for the eighth division of the SS cavalry, disguised as Italians, to seize St. Peter's and "massacre Pius XII with the entire Vatican"—and specifically names "the papal protest in favor of the Jews" as the cause.

A similar story can be traced across Europe. There is room to argue that more ought to have been attempted by the Catholic Church—for the unanswerable facts remain that Hitler did come to power, World War II did occur, and six million Jews did die. But the place to begin that argument is with the truth that people of the time, Nazis and Jews alike, understood the pope to be the world's most prominent opponent of the Nazi ideology:

As early as December 1940, in an article in *Time* magazine, Albert Einstein paid tribute to Pius: "Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced thus to confess that what I once despised, I now praise unreservedly."

In 1943, Chaim Weizmann, who would become Israel's first president, wrote that "the Holy See is lending its powerful help wherever it can, to mitigate the fate of my persecuted co-religionists."

Moshe Sharett, Israel's second prime minister, met with Pius in the closing days of the war and "told him that my first duty was to thank him, and through him the Catholic Church, on behalf of the Jewish public for all they had done in the various countries to rescue Jews."

Rabbi Isaac Herzog, chief rabbi of Israel, sent a message in February 1944 declaring, "The people of Israel will never forget what His Holiness and his illustrious delegates, inspired by the eternal principles of religion, which form the very foundation of true civilization, are doing for our unfortunate brothers and sisters in the most tragic hour of our history, which is living proof of Divine Providence in this world."

In September 1945, Leon Kubowitzky, secretary general of the World Jewish Congress, personally thanked the pope for his interventions, and the World Jewish Congress donated \$20,000 to Vatican charities "in recognition of the work of the Holy See in rescuing Jews from Fascist and Nazi persecutions."

In 1955, when Italy celebrated the tenth anniversary of its liberation, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities proclaimed April 17 a "Day of Gratitude" for the pope's wartime assistance.

On May 26, 1955, the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra flew to Rome to give in the Vatican a special performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony—an expression of the State of Israel's enduring gratitude to the pope for help given the Jewish people during the Holocaust.

This last example is particularly significant. As a matter of state policy, the Israeli Philharmonic has never played the music of Richard Wagner, because of his well-known reputation as "Hitler's composer," the cultural patron saint of the Third Reich. During the 1950s especially, the Israeli public, hundreds of thousands of whom were Holocaust survivors, still viewed Wagner as a symbol of the Nazi regime. It is inconceivable that the Israeli government would have paid for the entire orchestra to travel to Rome to pay tribute to "Hitler's pope." On the contrary, the Israeli Philharmonic's unprecedented concert in the Vatican was a unique communal gesture of collective recognition for a great friend of the Jewish people.

Hundreds of other memorials could be cited. In her conclusion to *Under His Very Windows*, Susan Zuccotti dismisses—as wrong-headed, ill-informed, or even devious—the praise Pius XII received from Jewish leaders and scholars, as well as expressions of gratitude from the Jewish chaplains and Holocaust survivors who bore personal witness to the assistance of the pope.

That she does so is disturbing. To deny the legitimacy of their gratitude to Pius XII is tantamount to denying the credibility of their personal testimony and judgment about the Holocaust itself. "More than all others," recalled Elio Toaff, an Italian Jew who lived through the Holocaust and later became chief rabbi of Rome, "we had the opportunity of experiencing the great compassionate goodness and magnanimity of the pope during the unhappy years of the persecution and terror, when it seemed that for us there was no longer an escape."

But Zuccotti is not alone. There is a disturbing element in nearly all the current work on Pius. Except for Rychlak's *Hitler, the War and the Pope*, none of the recent books—from Cornwell's vicious attack in *Hitler's Pope* to McNerny's uncritical defense in *The Defamation of Pius XII*—is finally about the Holocaust. All are about using the sufferings of Jews fifty years ago to force changes upon the Catholic Church today.

It is this abuse of the Holocaust that must be rejected. A true account of Pius XII would arrive, I believe, at exactly the opposite to Cornwell's conclusion: Pius XII was not Hitler's pope, but the closest Jews had come to having a papal supporter—and at the moment when it mattered most.

Writing in *Yad Vashem Studies* in 1983, John S. Conway—the leading authority on the Vatican's eleven-volume *Acts and Documents of the Holy See During the Second World*

*War*—concluded: "A close study of the many thousands of documents published in these volumes lends little support to the thesis that ecclesiastical self-preservation was the main motive behind the attitudes of the Vatican diplomats. Rather, the picture that emerges is one of a group of intelligent and conscientious men, seeking to pursue the paths of peace and justice, at a time when these ideals were ruthlessly being rendered irrelevant in a world of 'total war.'" These neglected volumes (which the English reader can find summarized in Pierre Blet's *Pius XII and the Second World War*) "will reveal ever more clearly and convincingly"—as John Paul told a group of Jewish leaders in Miami in 1987—"how deeply Pius XII felt the tragedy of the Jewish people, and how hard and effectively he worked to assist them."

The Talmud teaches that "whosoever preserves one life, it is accounted to him by Scripture as if he had preserved a whole world." More than any other twentieth-century leader, Pius fulfilled this Talmudic dictum, when the fate of European Jewry was at stake. No other pope had been so widely praised by Jews—and they were not mistaken. Their gratitude, as well as that of the entire generation of Holocaust survivors, testifies that Pius XII was, genuinely and profoundly, a righteous gentile.

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