

The Myth of Hitler's Pope

By Thomas E. Woods, Jr.
(appendices not by author)

This article is a book review of *The Myth of Hitler's Pope: How Pope Pius XII Rescued Jews from the Nazis* (Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2005) by Rabbi David G. Dalin.



Hard as it may be to fathom today, Pope Pius XII was deeply admired in his day and in the years following his pontificate. This admiration came from all kinds of quarters. Graham Greene, the liberal Catholic writer, described him as "a pope who many of us believe will rank among the greatest." Moving testimonies on the part of prominent European Jews (see afterword below) likewise indicate the esteem and love that so much of the world had for him.

That began to change in 1963 with the Berlin premiere of the left-wing German writer Rolf Hochhuth's fictional play *The Deputy*, which portrayed Pius XII as callous and indifferent in the face of Jewish suffering under the Nazis [see appendix]. Within three years of that event books critical of Pius began to appear, along with defenses by Jewish authors. Those defenses, all but forgotten in the present environment, were substantial. The Anti-Defamation League's representative in Rome, Joseph L. Lichten, wrote *A Question of Judgment*, a 1963 monograph in defense of Pius XII against the fictional depiction of the Pope in *The Deputy*. Israeli diplomat Pinchas Lapide, cited to this day by those who defend the Pope, wrote in his *Three Popes and the Jews* (1967) that Pius "was instrumental in saving at least 700,000, but probably as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands." The Hungarian Jewish historian Jenő Levai, outraged by the unjust attacks on Pius XII, wrote *Hungarian Jewry and the Papacy: Pius XII Did Not Remain Silent* (English translation, 1968). Levai, who steeped himself in archival materials of both Church and state, showed that the papal nuncio and the bishops "intervened again and again on the instructions of the pope," and that as a result of these labors "in the autumn and winter of 1944 there was practically no Catholic Church institution in Budapest where persecuted Jews did not find refuge."

In recent years the anti-Pius hysteria has reached a pitch that Jews and non-Jews alike could scarcely have imagined in 1958, the year of the Pope's death. The most celebrated example, of course, has been ex-seminarian John Cornwell's 1999 book *Hitler's Pope*, which makes Pius XII out to be a supporter of National Socialism who did little or nothing to stop Adolf Hitler's terrible campaign against the Jews.

Enter Rabbi David Dalin. Rabbi Dalin, who vigorously dissents from the anti-Pius orthodoxy, suggests in his new book *The Myth of Hitler's Pope: How Pope Pius XII Rescued Jews from the Nazis* that the great pontiff in fact deserves to be recognized as a "righteous Gentile" for his efforts to rescue Jews from the fate that awaited them at Nazi hands. "As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Pius XII, it would be both historically just and morally appropriate for Yad Vashem to posthumously recognize and honor Pius XII as one of the 'righteous among the nations.'"

As Rabbi Dalin shows, the Catholic Church, under direct orders from Pius XII, went to great lengths to shelter and protect Jews throughout Europe. *The Myth of Hitler's Pope* is filled with examples of heroism throughout the European continent, and case after case of rescuers and rescued alike honoring Pope Pius XII for his defiance of the Nazis. Particularly moving is the book's discussion of Pius' efforts on behalf of Slovakian Jews; Rabbi Dalin contends that 20,000 Jews escaped deportation as a direct result of the Pope's intervention.

Rabbi Dalin devotes considerable attention to the Nazi roundup of Jews in Rome, which has been the source of much controversy in the Pius XII debate. Michael Tagliacozzo, the leading authority on that terrible event (and himself a survivor of the roundup), says Pius XII "was the only one who intervened to impede the deportation of Jews on October 16, 1943, and he did very much to hide and save thousands of us." Archival evidence, he says, proves that it was the protests and actions of Pius XII that were responsible for rescuing 80 percent of Rome's Jews. At the Pope's behest, Jews were hidden all over the city, in churches, monasteries, and wherever room for them could be found.

Rabbi Dalin points out that neither Cornwell nor Susan Zuccotti, another Pius XII critic, mentions the sheltering of three thousand Jews at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope's own summer residence. "Yet at no other site in Nazi-occupied Europe were as many Jews saved and sheltered for as long a period as at Castel Gandolfo during the Nazi occupation of Rome." Kosher food was served to the Jews sheltered there. Jewish children were even born in the Pope's private apartments.

When in the summer of 1944 a group of Roman Jews came to thank the Pope for the protection he had extended to them, Pius replied: "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. Saint Paul tells us that the Jews are our brothers. They should also be welcomed as our friends."

Rabbi Dalin also notes that prominent Catholics who were honored for their efforts on behalf of the Jews have pointed to Pope Pius XII as the inspiration behind their actions. The future Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, while still Cardinals Roncalli and Montini, respectively, received high praise for their efforts to shelter and rescue Jews. In both cases, the future pontiffs shrugged that they were just following the orders of Pope Pius XII. Cardinal Pietro Palazzini, who hid many Italian Jews for several months in 1943 and 1944, was honored by Yad Vashem in 1985 as a "righteous Gentile." Cardinal Palazzini

emphasized that "the merit is entirely Pius XII's, who ordered us to do whatever we could to save the Jews from persecution."

It was partly because of his sympathy for the Jews and his opposition to National Socialism that Pius was in fact strongly disliked by the Nazis; Hitler's regime actually lobbied against the election of Pacelli to replace Pius XI as pope. Pacelli was referred to as Pius XI's "Jew-loving" cardinal. Rabbi Dalin points out that "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."

As Cardinal Pacelli he had played a central role in the drafting of *Mit Brennender Sorge* [German: "With Burning Concern"], Pius XI's 1937 encyclical condemning Nazism. His inaugural encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus* (1939), made clear the incompatibility of National Socialism with the Catholic faith. The *New York Times* headline read, "Pope Condemns Dictators, Treaty Violators, Racism." Allied aircraft even dropped some 88,000 copies of the Pope's document over Germany in order to undermine the Nazi government. The abortive Nazi plan to kidnap Pius XII is also rather difficult to square with the "Hitler's Pope" myth.

Now if what Rabbi Dalin says in this book is true and Pope Pius XII was in fact a great friend of the Jews, how do we account for the ceaseless attacks on the wartime pontiff? Let Rabbi Dalin answer that one:

Very few of the many recent books about Pius XII and the Holocaust are actually about Pius XII and the Holocaust. The liberal bestselling attacks on the pope and the Catholic Church are really an intra-Catholic argument about the direction of the Church today. The Holocaust is simply the biggest club available for liberal Catholics to use against traditional Catholics in their attempt to bash the papacy and thereby to smash traditional Catholic teaching....

Dalin concludes: "The anti-papal polemics of ex-seminarians like Garry Wills and John Cornwell (author of *Hitler's Pope*), of ex-priests like James Carroll, and of other lapsed or angry liberal Catholics exploit the tragedy of the Jewish people during the Holocaust to foster their own political agenda of forcing changes on the Catholic Church today."

Rabbi Dalin has performed an extraordinary service on behalf of Pope Pius XII and for the Catholic Church in general. The severity of the attacks that await him can only be imagined. He deserves Catholics' support, and their gratitude.

Imagine if this book, in which a rabbi defends Pope Pius XII, became a national bestseller. The mainstream media, which has gone out of its way to showcase condemnations of this great pope while ignoring cogent and persuasive defenses, would be left gasping in shock, scarcely knowing how to react. What a glorious sight that would be. If you're like me, you're already out the door to buy a copy and help make it happen.

Professor Thomas E. Woods, Jr. is an award-winning American historian, economist, political analyst, and best-selling author. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Harvard and his Ph.D. from Columbia.

APPENDICES

Ghostwriting *The Deputy*



In 2007 Ion Mihai Pacepa, the highest-ranking intelligence officer ever to have defected from the former Soviet bloc (he was a two-star Romanian State Security general and advisor to President Nicolae Ceausescue), revealed that “in February 1960, Nikita Khrushchev approved a super-secret plan for destroying the Vatican’s moral authority in Western Europe.” The plan materialized as the play *The Deputy*, that portrayed then recently deceased Pope Pius XII “as a coldhearted Nazi sympathizer.” According to Pacepa, while Rolf Hochhuth was chosen as the playwright, the actual idea was the brainchild of KGB chairman Aleksandr Shelepin and Aleksey Kirichenko, the Soviet Politburo member responsible for international policies. Pacepa claims to have been personally involved in negotiating access to the Vatican Archives so that operatives of the Romanian foreign intelligence service, posing as priests, could illicitly copy documents to add credibility to the play’s contention. They “succeeded in pilfering hundreds of documents” but “in actual fact, no incriminating material against the pontiff ever turned up in all those secretly photographed documents.” Nonetheless the documents were intentionally misrepresented as giving support to the charge (“Moscow’s Assault on the Vatican,” *National Review Online*, January 25, 2007).

Jewish Tributes to Pope Pius XII & the Catholic Church

Made either during the Pope’s life or at the time of his death

No keener rebuke has come to Nazism than from Pope Pius XI and his successor, Pope Pius XII. ~ Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary of America

We share in the grief of humanity [at the death of Pius XII].... When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the pope was raised for the victims. The life of our times was enriched by a voice speaking out on the great moral truths above the

tumult of daily conflict. We mourn a great servant of peace. ~ Golda Meir, Israeli Foreign Minister (later Prime Minister)

In the most difficult hours of which we Jews of Romania have passed through, the generous assistance of the Holy See...was decisive and salutary. It is not easy for us to find the right words to express the warmth and consolation we experienced because of the concern of the supreme pontiff, who offered a large sum to relieve the sufferings of deported Jews.... The Jews of Romania will never forget these facts of historic importance. ~ Rabbi Alexander Safran, Chief Rabbi of Romania

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. ~ Rabbi Isaac Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel

I told [Pope Pius XII] 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.... We are deeply grateful to the Catholic Church. ~ Moshe Sharett (who later became Israel's first Foreign Minister and second Prime Minister)

What the Vatican did will be indelibly and eternally engraved in our hearts. . . . Priests and even high prelates did things that will forever be an honor to Catholicism. ~ Rabbi Israel Zolli, Chief Rabbi of Rome during World War II (Later he converted to Catholicism taking as his baptismal name Eugenio, Pius XII's given name)

Being a lover of freedom, when the revolution came in Germany, I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but, no, the universities immediately were silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom; but they, like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks...

Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing 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. ~ Albert Einstein, Nobel Prize winning physicist

Only the Catholic Church protested against the Hitlerian onslaught on liberty. Up till then I had not been interested in the Church, but today I feel a great admiration for the Church, which alone has had the courage to struggle for spiritual truth and moral liberty. ~ Rabbi Pinchas Lapide, Israeli consul to Milan