

# POPE PIUS XII

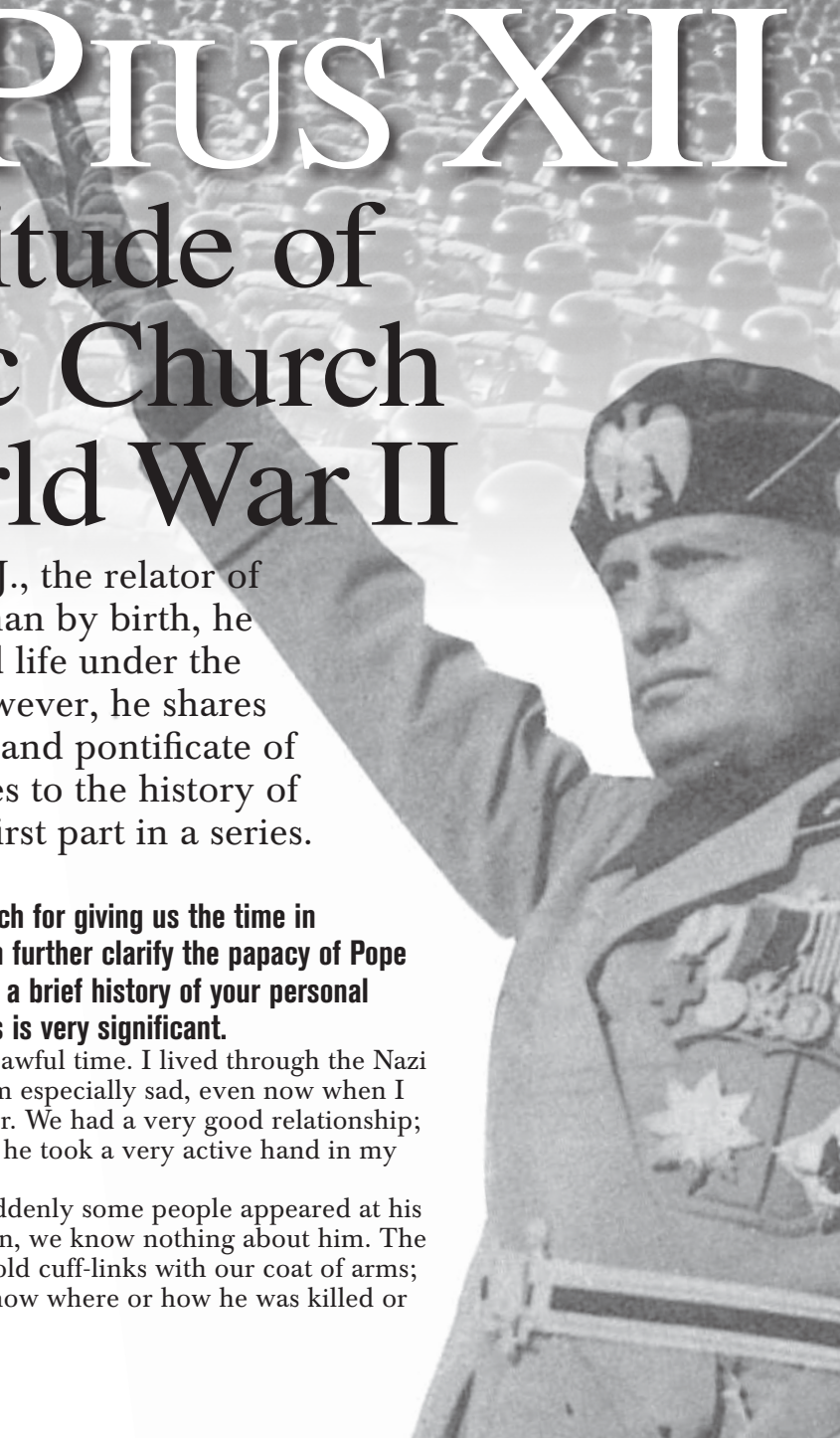
## and the Attitude of the Catholic Church During World War II

Interview with Fr. Peter Gumpel, S.J., the relator of the cause of Pope Pius XII. A German by birth, he relates his own personal history and life under the Nazi regime. More importantly, however, he shares his decades of research into the life and pontificate of Pope Pius XII, especially as it relates to the history of the Second World War. This is the first part in a series.

**Fr. Gumpel, first of all I'd like to thank you very much for giving us the time in describing your personal experience so that we can further clarify the papacy of Pope Pius XII in the eyes of the world. Could you give us a brief history of your personal experience under Nazi rule in Germany? I think this is very significant.**

Frankly, I am not very eager to talk about this awful time. I lived through the Nazi period, I was exiled twice to save my own life. I am especially sad, even now when I think about it, that they killed my good grandfather. We had a very good relationship; I was destined to become his direct successor, and he took a very active hand in my instruction, formation and education.

Unfortunately, before World War II began, suddenly some people appeared at his villa and asked him to accompany them. Since then, we know nothing about him. The only thing that ever came to light was one of his gold cuff-links with our coat of arms; this was the only thing we ever found. We don't know where or how he was killed or



where he is buried. Nothing whatsoever. This is one of the memories which I do not like to recall, as you can well understand.

Second, I remember a message I received when I was between 14 and 15 years old from my uncle, my mother's brother. He told me, "Peter, you are getting older now and you are no longer a small child. I can tell you very frankly that a very serious thing has happened to your mother." So I asked what happened. He said, "Well, your mother went for a long walk and had a very bad accident and it is extremely serious." So I asked if she was in the hospital. He answered, "No, it is much worse." So I asked if she were dead. And he said: "Yes." And then he said he was leaving immediately to try at least to get permission to bring her mortal remains home.

So there you are. I was between 14 and 15 years old. I knew why my mother had left Berlin. Word had reached us that my grandfather's house—a rather splendid piece of property which he had bequeathed to me—had been invaded by the Nazi's and that they had destroyed everything. My mother wanted to go there so that one day, when Hitler's terrible period was over, she could put in a claim of reparation to the next government. Unfortunately, the photographer she had approached denounced her to the Nazi's. She was arrested, and then I received the message above.

This is a thing that might be difficult to understand from a of psychological point of view. I believed what my uncle had told me. He was a trustworthy man, an engineer, a cool-headed person. I sat down and wondered what I should do about it. And then, thanks be to God, I remembered that once, in my presence, a general—a friend of the family—had told my mother to get in touch with him if there was ever any serious crisis. I knew that he had left his telephone number, albeit ciphered, but I knew how to decipher it by reading it backwards, *etc.*

So I went to the street telephone since I couldn't use our telephone; it was wiretapped. I called him from the public telephone and, thanks be to God, he was in his office. I asked if I could see him. He said yes and gave me a place to meet. I explained the situation and he said, "Time is running short because I understand the idea is your mother has not been killed. But there is an order by Himmler himself and Hitler that she is to be shot tomorrow morning at 5am. I know this." I asked if there was anything we could do. He said he would speak to one of the most important military officers, his superior, another general. He asked me to call him at the same number in an hour.

He arranged for me to meet this general in a very dark street in Berlin in the middle of the night in the hope that it would be successful. But he told me not to have too much hope. So I went and met this officer, who was in civilian clothes, a hat, and dark glasses. I had prepared what I had wanted to say but when I actually arrived, I had forgotten every word. I simply

looked at him. And I said: "General, you know exactly what is going to happen. Now I ask you: What are you and your colleagues doing?" He removed his spectacles and looked at me—I don't think he had ever been spoken to like that by a boy—and said: "You know, from your eyes speaks the conscience of your nation. I will do a very risky thing. Hitler always goes to sleep very late. I will go to him and threaten him." And he did.

However, I didn't notice, but when I got home, it was 3am. There was an SS officer standing in front of my home. My first reaction was that Hitler was probably enraged when he found out what I had done and now I would be killed as well. But it wasn't like that. He told me that Hitler sent him to get my mother back by plane the same day. He said: "I am telling you that out of human consideration, but if it ever becomes known that I paid you a visit, I will have to pay for it."

Later they killed a nephew of mine for the simple reason that he was a good Catholic and didn't do what they asked him to do; he refused point blank to do a treacherous thing. And for this they shot him from behind.

I was personally exiled twice. In 1934, the situation for my family became dangerous, with people assembling in front of our villa in Hanover, shouting, *etc.* It was decided that, since I was the future heir of the entire property—a huge concern—I should be sent to France for two years. So I went, without knowing a single word of French, learning in a French school, and so on. This was my first exile. Later, when I returned to Berlin, we were given the assurance that they would not try to do anything against us, but could you trust Hitler's word?

In 1938, when the situation arose again, after other similar experiences, they sent me to Holland for a definite period, where I went for my second exile.

**From your research, I'm interested in Eugenio Pacelli's personal experience with Jewish people; with his friends, for example. Can you tell me anything about his childhood with Jewish friends?**

Definitely, yes. His very best friend was Jewish, Guido Mendes, who eventually became a famous surgeon and went to Israel. During the Jewish persecution, Pope Pius XII saw to it that he could leave Switzerland. Mendes became, later, in Israel, a famous surgeon and professor of medicine. These two were close friends; he was really young Pacelli's best friend. They visited one another at their respective homes. It has been said, with some humor, that Pacelli was probably the only Pope who ever partook of a kosher meal! When he went to his friend's house, he obviously ate what was offered.

They were truly best friends, had discussions, exchanged books, *etc.* When Pope Pius XII died in 1958, Guido Mendes went on record to recall his memories of his former classmate, and he said that not only were they personally friends, but that Pacelli had

been friendly with all their Jewish classmates, polite, always correct, and the very best student among all of us.

### **Do you have any examples from when he was Apostolic Nuncio in Germany of his intervention to help save Jewish lives?**

Certainly there are a few incidents. For example, when he first arrived in Berlin he became very friendly with a Jewish conductor, Bruno Walter, because Pacelli loved music. He personally played the violin well although he eventually gave it up for lack of time. At the time, this conductor was directing the Royal Opera in Berlin. It so happened that one of the people playing in the orchestra, also a Jewish gentleman by the name of Gribilowski, was arrested in an anti-Semitic movement. Bruno Walter did everything to free him, without success. So he went to Pacelli, the Apostolic Nuncio, his friend, who immediately took action. The next morning the man was free. This is a typical example.

An even greater example of what he did regards a person named Walter Rathenau. He, a Jew, was Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs, similar to America's Foreign Secretary. At some point, Pacelli received a priest who said, "Your Excellency, I feel it my duty to inform you that people are planning to kill Rathenau. This is serious information." So Pacelli called for an immediate audience with Germany's Chancellor, Dr. Joseph Wirth, explained it to him, and it was taken seriously. He called in Wirth and gave him a significant police escort since his life was in danger. And Rathenau laughed it off and thought it impossible. A few weeks later, on June 22nd, he was effectively assassinated.

There are other examples, but if you consider these facts, can you say that Pius XII was anti-Semitic? I think this is downright foolish. He did whatever he could, at this time and later on, to help Jews and many other people wherever he could.

### **You mentioned before that some of the time that you spent in exile was spent in Holland. Would you mind relating to us the story when they began arresting the Dutch Jews? By this time, Eugenio Pacelli was Pope, and I believe that he made a statement through the Nuncio and other diplomatic channels.**

Of course, you have to understand that this was 1942. Holland was invaded by the German army on May 10, 1940. One of the very first things they did was to expel the Apostolic Nuncio. Thus, in 1942, there was no Apostolic Nuncio.

However, I think that you are referring to something which happened on the last Sunday of July in 1942. Being a good Catholic boy, on Sunday I went to church to fulfill my obligation; I liked going to church anyway. This particular Sunday, there was no sermon. The priest approached the pulpit and said,

"There is no sermon today. Instead, I am going to read a Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop of Utrecht (the only Archbishop in Holland)." And he did. To my great surprise, there was a very strong protest against the deportation of Jewish and young men to be forced to work for the German armament industry in Germany. There was also a flaming protest against another thing, in the strongest possible terms. And this was a protest against the forced deportation of Jewish Dutch citizens. This was extremely strong.

At this time, I was 18 years old and had just completed my first year of philosophical studies, on my way to a Master's degree in philosophy. So I was no longer a child. My reaction was twofold: One, I had great admiration for the courage and noble gesture of the Archbishop for people who did not belong to his flock. In Holland, the relationship between Jews and Catholics was normal. They were not particularly intimate, but they were polite. However, the fact that he, as a Catholic Archbishop, during the Nazi occupation, would have the courage to come out with such a strong statement in defense of people who did not belong to the Catholic Church caused my greatest admiration. This was my first reaction.

At the same time, my second reaction was "My good Archbishop, do you know what you are doing!" I had experience with the Nazis and knew how they would react—and they did. A few days later, one of the top officials in the Nazi government of Holland gave a speech in the capital saying, "If the Roman Catholic Church thinks that they can behave as this gentleman has done, they are seriously mistaken. Number one, this action will not cause a single Jew to be saved; on the contrary, we will accelerate the deportation of the Jewish people. Number two, we had not decided to deport Jews who had been baptized into the Catholic Church. But now, in response to this Archbishop, they will be the first to be deported." And they were.

Later on, when Dr. Robert Kempner put on trial those who were responsible for the deportation of these 600 Jews, he condemned them in the strongest possible terms and praised the courage of this Archbishop while at the same time making it clear that it was a total disaster.

This fact was immediately reported to Pope Pius XII. It induced him even further not to come out with flaming protests because he was convinced—and rightly so—that any public pronouncement would not help anything; on the contrary, it would aggravate the situation. He said he would not put this on his conscience. He recognized that he could make large gestures and be congratulated—but, at the same time, how many Jews would pay with their lives for this kind of gesture? He would not burden his conscience with this kind of stupidity.

## Would you say that this Archbishop's position reflected that of the Catholic Church?

Well, he knew perfectly well. All the bishops knew in Germany with the exception of one Nazi bishop who had been imposed on them, the bishop of the army. It was a choice between him and not to give spiritual care to those in the army. We were practically forced. But he was excluded from the German episcopal conference.

With this exception, all the bishops knew—in Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, all the occupied countries—perfectly well the position of the pope. He wanted them to do everything possible to have all persecuted persons—not only the Jews, but especially the Jews because they were more persecuted than anybody else.

Later the Pope sent a private messenger, Father Smulders, a Dutch Jesuit whom I knew well personally. The message said to do what we could to help the Jews. And these messages were sent all over. There was no doubt what the Pope wanted. Wherever there was an Apostolic Nuncio—in Hungary, Slovakia, *etc.*—they were instructed to do this and to communicate it to the bishops. If not, personal messages were sent all over to inform bishops to do what they could.

If you look at the writings of Pius XII to the German bishops, it is all carefully worded because you never knew if they would fall into the hands of people who should not see them. But for anyone who knows the time and style of Pius XII, it is obvious that he encouraged them to help.

**I'd like to read a few quotes to you because I believe they're very significant. This was one thing, first of all, that was to give an example of the Pope's opinion of the Nazis. Joseph Lichten, who was the Anti-Defamation League director when he was discussing the election of Pope Pius XII when he was a cardinal, said that the election of Cardinal Pacelli is not accepted with favor in Germany because he was always opposed to Nazism and practically determined the policies of the Vatican under his predecessor. So Joseph Lichten, who was very prominently a Jewish leader certainly, made this statement. I was wondering if you could comment on this statement made by Joseph Lichten?**

Well, this statement is not new to me. Of course, I've come across it many times in my studies of the cause of Pius XII of which I am in charge of the investigation. I know this statement, and his is not the only one. There were very many others, even scores of statements to the same effect from all kinds of Jewish organizations, even political people. Golda Meir, the Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, Einstein, and so many others. There were many people with regard to the statement that the election of Cardinal Pacelli to be the successor of Pope Pius XI was not well seen in Germany—obviously not. They knew perfectly well

from the very beginning he had been hostile to them. You see, when Pacelli left Germany in 1929, he warned German politicians to beware of Hitler. He said, "Well, you see, I have read this terrible book he has written. That is a man who will tear down anything that stands in his way. He is a man capable of walking over corpses!" He warned them, but of course, what could he do? These things became known to the Nazis.

It was also, as Lichten rightly said, perfectly true that Pacelli was instrumental even in a determining way in drafting the famous Encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*. This was published in Germany. It's the only encyclical ever written in German. It was smuggled into Germany by a diplomatic pouch, distributed by persons on motor bicycles or cars to the individual bishops, printed in hundreds of thousands of copies, read out from all the pulpits in Germany on a given day; and of course the Nazis were furious because there are statements about extolling race above everything else, *etc.* Therefore it is a total condemnation of the racist ideology of the Nazis.

Whenever they could get hold of a printed copy of this, the man went to prison. They couldn't keep it from being read in all the churches because only on the Saturday evening before were they informed by a traitor, an employee of a printing establishment who had printed these things, who went to the Gestapo; but they couldn't do anything because they couldn't get hold of this thing. I know because every precaution was taken. Even I was commanding officer as a boy officer in a Catholic school in Berlin in 1937. My boys and I went around to parishes with copies under our coats. Ostensibly, we were going to confession because in the confessional people couldn't see what we were doing. We knew exactly to whom we were supposed to go because not all the priests were equally safe. Then we handed them over, and a number of them locked them in the tabernacle and only took them out shortly before the service began the next Sunday. So they were furious.

But there was one more thing that people overlook at times. You see, I have read dozens and dozens of books about Pius XII and his attitude toward Nazism, *etc.* Why on earth did people not take the precautions that I have taken in my investigations of Pius XII? There are two reasons. One: what did Jewish people write and say during the Second World War? I asked one of my collaborators to go to the New York Public Library, which is the best place to research what was said in Jewish newspapers, Jewish reviews, publications, *etc.*, and not only of American origin, but from England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, *etc.* In the entire free world there is nothing but praise about Pius XII in the Jewish publications of that period. That is point one. You can take a similar endeavor in this regard, seeing what was published in Nazi Germany and in countries occupied by the Nazis where the Nazis dictated what should be written about: You get the totally opposite picture. There is nothing

but attacks on Pius XII. He is ridiculed; he is smeared with all kinds of things; there are pictures with him in the middle of swine—it is just awful. Now, that is typical of the attitude for these two sets of people: the Jewish people at that time and the Nazis. The Jewish people praised Pius XII for what he did, the others attack him and call him “a Jew-boy, a Jew-Pope, a Jew-Cardinal,” *etc.* They say he is defending the Jewish warmongers, *etc.* So it couldn’t be worse. Now this is revealing, and it is very strange to me that trained historians, as I am, never undertook this effort.

**This was after he passed away. There is a quote from Golda Meir, who was at that time the Israeli representative to the UN and the future prime minister of Israel. Upon receiving the news of the death of Pope Pius XII she said, “We share the grief of the world over the death of his holiness, Pope Pius XII. During the ten years of Nazi terror when our people passed through the horrors of martyrdom, the Pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and to commiserate with their victims.” This is very substantial—this is Golda Meir. If I may continue, Mr. Nahum Goldman, who at that time was president of the World Jewish Congress said, “It is with special gratitude that we remember all he has done for the persecuted Jews during one of the darkest periods of their entire history.” And to further this, Rabbi Elio Toaff, who was the chief rabbi of Rome stated, “More than anyone else we have had the opportunity to appreciate the kindness filled with compassion and magnanimity that the Pope displayed during the terrible years of the persecution and terror.” And I’d like to read one more from Albert Einstein: “Only the Catholic Church protested against the Hitlerian onslaught on liberty. Until then, I had not been interested in the Church. But today I feel great admiration for the Church, which alone has had the courage to struggle for the spiritual truth and moral liberty.” Now these are very decisive statements. What I’d like to ask you is: In light of the obviously positive influence of all these facts on the Jewish people, why do you think this changed? What happened to cause this to change suddenly?**

To tell the truth, it has always been in a sense mysterious to me how this was possible. But the immediate occasion, to answer your question very directly, is, of course, the play written by a man named Rolf Hochhuth that attacked Pius XII. It is not an historical kind of work at all. It is pure fantasy even though he claims it is historically accurate. It is not. It is simply an effort to attack and denigrate Pius XII, to calumniate him, to put it very bluntly. And, of course,

who was this Rolf Hochhuth when he wrote it? He was a young man just over 30 years old.

### **What was the name of the play?**

In German it’s called *Der Stellvertreter*. In English-speaking countries it has two names: some call it *The Vicar*, and some call it *The Deputy*. I believe that in America the more common name is *The Deputy*; in England, it’s *The Vicar*. So he was a young man when he wrote this kind of thing. He was so inept that if this thing had been produced as he had written it, it would have lasted seven or eight hours. You can well imagine: endless monologues, *etc.* It would have been boring. He had, however, the good fortune that this play came into the hands of a very famous director and producer by the name of Erwin Piscator. This man had already joined the German Communist party in 1918. He was a dyed-in-the-wool communist.

When Hitler came to power, [Piscator] went to Moscow, and from that moment on he continued to receive his instructions and orders from Moscow. That was the man who put this thing into shape. And being a very able director, he used all kinds of effects that could create an impression in listeners who were not familiar with the real history. And it did, unfortunately. The book he published simultaneously under the direction of Erwin Piscator is absolutely worthless from an historical point of view. I don’t know any serious historians nowadays who pay any attention to it. But this is one thing.

The other thing is its effect on the public mind. That is why when this play was produced, they changed it in different countries—in the United States, for example; and they changed it again for production in England, *etc.* But the communists and left-wing people altogether promoted it the best possible way they could. For example, in the Russian-occupied, Communist-occupied countries until 1989 it had to be produced at least once a year in all the major cities. And Erwin Piscator remained a communist until the end of his life. He also spent a period in a tiny college in the US, but a very left-wing college. That is the point: he was an able man.

So there is one thing I think people should not forget: Hochhuth did not only write this play with the help of Piscator, he wrote another play, this time not against a man of the Church, but against Winston Churchill. And he denigrated Winston Churchill, accused him point blank of being the murderer of the Polish general Sikorsky, who was at that time the head of the Polish government in exile. Now the curious thing is, in English law at least—and I studied four years in England so I know a good deal about English law—only the person who has been calumniated can react against this. Churchill was dead, Pius XII was dead, so Hochhuth could do whatever he wanted without being punished. He made a huge mistake: he thought the pilot had been killed because Sikorsky was killed in a plane crash close to Gibraltar. But the pilot was

still alive. The pilot was a high-ranking officer in the RAF, but now in retirement. He was born Czech, but he had gone to California for his retirement. He read about it in the newspapers and said, "What?" He made an inquiry and, having been accused of being the pilot who caused this accident in which Sikorsky was killed, he took Hochhuth to court.

He did this because they had started to perform the play which in German is called *Die Soldaten* and in English *The Soldiers*. So he took the producer and Hochhuth and everybody else connected to this to court, and they were very severely condemned for slander. I myself listened to one of the final meetings, and I am accustomed to what British lawyers do. Usually they are very cold, but in this particular instance they were ice cold and cuttingly sharp. And the defendant Hochhuth didn't appear, which was good for him or he would've been arrested on the spot, you see, because there was a public outcry after this happened. So here you have two parallel cases, two people who have died. Both are denigrated, calumniated without any cause whatsoever. In one case, well, it's a pope—it's a man of the Church. The Church did not take him to court, *etc.*; the other party did. This play, *The Soldier*, has completely disappeared everywhere. It is never performed, cannot be performed. It is punishable to perform it. With Pius XII things are different. But to answer your question, to return to the starting point, the turnover in public opinion is due to Rolf Hochhuth's scandalous play.

**We discussed earlier the fact that the Pope actually was working behind the scenes in a very dangerous way as a go-between between the British and the German generals. Would you elaborate on this?**


Certainly. This happened in the last months of 1939 and the first months of 1940. To put this thing into a proper historical setting, the war in Poland is over, but a big offensive against the west—Holland, Belgium, France, *etc.*—has not yet begun. There was always a group of German generals who were utterly opposed to Hitler, led by a famous general by the name of Ludwig Beck, who was head of the General Staff of the German army and who resigned in protest against Hitler's policy. So he was put in retirement—he wanted to be put into retirement, he didn't want anything to do with it. But he was the one behind the scenes who continued to act against Hitler, trying to remove him—not to kill him. He was a good Christian—not a Catholic, a Protestant. There were two possibilities: Either to put him in front of a German tribunal or to shut him up in a lunatic asylum. That was the idea.

The German generals' problem was this: we are at war with France and England. If we remove Hitler, there will be the possibility of a civil war because there are still many people who are in favor of Hitler—the army was questionable. It will be a very uncertain situation. Our enemies could make use of

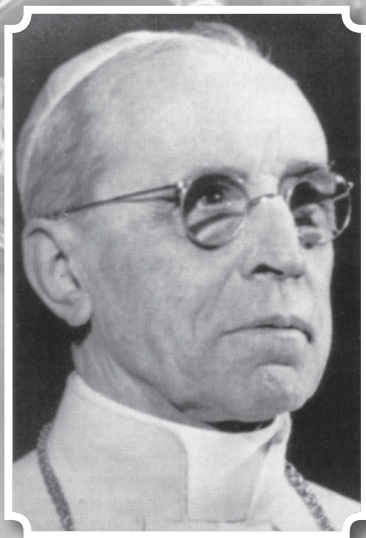
this opportunity, invade us and defeat us like that. So we will try to remove Hitler, but we want to have the assurance that neither France nor England will attack us at this particular very delicate and dangerous moment. How could this be effected? They had no direct contact, of course, with Great Britain, but Beck had known Pius XII when he was apostolic nuncio, so he got the idea to send somebody, a certain Dr. Josef Muller, who later became minister of state after the war in Bavaria, to Rome. He was incorporated into the German counter-espionage. He went to Rome and through an intermediary put this proposal to Pius XII.

Now, this was a highly dangerous thing to do. Pius XII said, "Well, I must do everything I can, because if the war continues it may cost millions of human lives and this would also be an opportunity to stop this madman and his killing of innocent people all over: the Jews and others." So he decided to go ahead with it. He approached the British ambassador who was living in the Vatican at the time, and the ambassador transmitted it. All the documents are in the British archive in Kew; I've seen them there myself. This is not something that was made up, no. Certain people argue that all the documents are not in the Vatican. You won't find a scrap of paper in the Vatican archives about it because it was too dangerous. If there were ever an invasion by the Fascists, the Nazis would have found it; it would have been a terrible thing for the Catholic Church. But the whole correspondence going back and forth is in the British archives in Kew, Great Britain's central archives. And they say it very clearly.

Now, this thing went back and forth. The German generals continued to put pressure on the Pope. The English were hesitant, and they said, "Well, who are these generals?" But the Pope said, "I can't give you the names because giving out names like that could mean that somebody by indiscretion or spying would find out, and these people would be shot on the spot. But I assure you that the persons who are heading this group are honest, very serious people."

In the end, the generals did not succeed in overthrowing Hitler, so the whole thing fell flat. But the fact remains that in a critical situation like this, the Pope had the courage to undertake something that might have caused absolute, disastrous damage to the Catholic Church had Hitler ever come to know about this endeavor. Thanks be to God, people kept their mouths shut. The English had promised to keep this secret, and they kept their promise. And, of course, the Pope was the last person to be interested in divulging it. Hardly anybody in his immediate surrounding knew about it, not even the secretary of state. 

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# POPE PIUS XII

## and the Attitude of the Catholic Church During World War II

**PART 2**

This is the continuation of the interview with Fr. Peter Gumpel, S.J., the relator of the cause of Pope Pius XII. He continues sharing his research of Pope Pius XII's pontificate and actions during World War II.

**I'd like to go to a different subject now. We know that during the war here in Rome, there were maybe up to 9,000 Jews during the Nazi occupation. Could you tell us, based on your personal knowledge, exactly what happened on October 15-16, 1943, when the Nazis began arresting the Roman Jews and how the Church and the Pope reacted to this?**

First of all, you are mentioning rightly that this happened in the night between the 15th and 16th in October, 1943. Of course, it must be pointed out that in this period, Rome, northern Italy, and part of central Italy were occupied by the Germans. Mussolini had been deposed and the Germans had invaded Italy and occupied Rome. Now, in Rome there were, as you said, several thousand Jews. It is

very difficult to determine the exact data; at least 6,000 to 7,000 permanent residents. But many Jews from other parts of Italy had flocked to Rome and also people from abroad because they felt Rome was a safe place, safer than any other place in Italy or elsewhere.

Secondly, many people came to Rome because they knew the Pope was making every possible effort to facilitate their immigration in neutral countries—especially in the US—if at all possible through France, Portugal, *etc.* So there were more than the usual Jewish residents in Rome. The exact number is very difficult to ascertain because the people who illegally came to Rome from other countries anonymously did not, of course, announce

it to the police. They were very careful not to announce their presence.

Having stated this, what really happened? Well, Himmler, the person most violently opposed to the Jews, had sent down a detachment of 365 SS men led by a certain Captain Dannecker. That's the name of the man who was supposed to arrest all of the Jews living in Rome. Of course, 365 people is very little. So he made an appeal to the general commander in Italy (in the South Front, as it was called), Field Marshall Kesselring, who refused point blank to give even one single soldier. This was because his troops were still doing much fighting south of Rome against the Americans, the Allies, the English, *etc.* So, he said no.

The military commander of Rome went further. He told his staff, "I won't have anything to do with this swinish business." This military commander was an Austrian, an officer of the old school, a Christian, although not a Roman Catholic: but a so-called Old Catholic (people who had broken away, a schismatic sect which had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1870), but a very honest person. This is the background.

Previously, through the 15th of October, the SS in Rome had taken another step. They called the heads of the Jewish community. They knew who they were. They had both been Fascists, therefore they felt safe. They called them and they said, "In a very short period if you do not produce 50kg [110 lbs.] of gold, 200 Jews will be deported to Germany." Now the Jews did their best to bring this amount in a very short period. They succeeded in getting 35kg [77 lbs.], but not 50. At that moment, the chief rabbi of Rome, Israel Zolli, went to the Vatican. He met with one of the heads of the financial department of the Vatican, a certain Dr. Nogara, and explained the situation. He said, "Can you possibly loan us the 15kg of gold?" He said, "Well, I can't give you permission like that." But he went directly to the Pope, and the Pope said, "Of course. If necessary, we will melt down gold chalices. Ask whether they will perhaps accept payment in dollars or equivalent. However, we will do what we can." As on a loan basis, with no period fixed for repayment, no interest, absolutely nothing.

The intention was, really, that he didn't want to humiliate them because Zolli had said of course they were going to repay it. So it was to be given under these favorable conditions. However, it turned out that the help of the Vatican was not necessary. It seems the difference of 15kg of gold was made up by Roman Catholics in Rome. There is no definitive proof, but where did the gold come from? Not from the Jews, because they had given whatever they had. However, this is incidental.

When this happened, Isaac Zolli, the chief rabbi, had told the lay people in charge of the Jewish

community, "Look, let's close down the temple. Let's remove the names" (because they had a full list of all the Jewish people living in Rome). "Let's give a period of vacancy or holiday, and pay all the employees we have." Now they laughed at him and said, "Your alarm is for nothing! Nothing is going to happen to us. We have lived here in Italy for so long, there is no problem." So they didn't do anything. So when, falling short on the promise to leave the Jews in peace when they had paid to go on, breaking that promise, the Nazis invaded the temple and took hold of everything: the money, all the names and addresses, *etc.* So they knew exactly where to go.

Of course, there was a lot of noise when this happened. About 1,000 people were arrested—not all of them—because a detachment of 365 was simply not sufficient. This caused a lot of noise, and a lady was looking out her window and saw what was going to happen: these people were carted off in lorries [trucks]. She called her friend, Princess Pignatelli Cortez Aaragon, a person with whom I had, years ago, several long interviews and talks because I wanted to find out directly from her what happened. She called—she was in a sense very curious—a member of the German embassy, a certain Wollenweber. And he with his diplomatic German pass took her right into the Vatican.

She was a courageous woman, a very tiny little person, but a courageous woman. She knew where the Pope was celebrating Mass in his private apartment. She entered, spoke to the Pope, and the Pope in her presence called the secretary of state, ordering him to call immediately the German ambassador to make a very strong protest. And in fact, the meeting took place. The German ambassador, Ernst von Weizäcker immediately went to see Cardinal Maglione, the Secretary of State. And the cardinal made it perfectly clear that the Pope was outraged by this, that in his own diocese, practically under his windows as was later said, these things happened. Weizäcker said, "For heaven's sake, don't make a public protest! You know what Hitler is like! Leave it to me, I'm going to take care of the matter." And they left it at that.

But the Pope didn't trust that. In fact, Weizäcker didn't do a thing. Nothing...until the next day, when everything was over. In the meantime, however, a combined effort was made by an Austrian bishop, an otherwise rather disreputable person, and a German diplomat who was hostile to Hitler. They prepared a letter, and the letter had no effect whatsoever. But now another actor comes in: one of the most confidential collaborators of the Pope who did a lot to help Jews and other persecuted people. He was a Bavarian and he knew this German commander, Brigadier General Stahl. He went to him and insisted that the Pope wanted something





effective to be done, something to stop it once and for all. Stahl listened and sent his assistant to the ambassador, requesting he take immediate action. The ambassador said he could do nothing.

### **What was the name of the Austrian who was a close collaborator of the Pope?**

It was Fr. Pankratus Pfeiffer, the general of the Salvatorians, who lived close by. So when Stahl's appeal, which he made by request of Pius XII, had no success with the German ambassador, he took the matter into his own hands. Now, what I'm going to tell you now is not very publicly known, but it may be useful that you know it. I got in touch with General Dietrich Beelitz, who was the liaison officer between headquarters of Field Marshall Kesselring and the headquarters of Hitler himself. As a liaison officer he listened to every single communication that went on between these two headquarters. And, of course, he knew Stahl. After some difficult negotiations, I got in touch with Beelitz and we had several long telephone conversations. I said, "General, you must know exactly what Stahl did. I know that he telephoned Himmler, but I don't know anything about what he said. Do you know about that?" He said, "I do." He never gave this information to journalists, but he gave me permission to use it for the process of Pius XII and I printed it.

He told me the following: Stahl took it upon himself to phone Heinrich Himmler, the chief of the SS, directly and threatened him. Of course, humanitarian reasons with a man like that were absolutely useless. So he used military reasons. He said, "Herr Himmler, if you continue to do what

you are doing now, you will make it impossible for me to provide our troops which are still fighting far to the south of Rome with the material they need, which is one of my chief tasks here. If you continue, I am afraid there will be an uprising in Rome, there will be an uprising south of Rome, and it will not be possible for me to provision our fighting troops—we can write them off. Right away. If you want to do it, go ahead. I won't." He threatened him like that.

He said, "Look, during the day, the Allies have absolute dominion in the air. They are strafing our trains, our lorries, *etc.*, so that's very difficult. During the night, we have to deal with the partisans. This difficult situation is already very critical. You continue, and it is hopeless." Now Hitler, who was not a military man, listening to a highly decorated general was so impressed that immediately he ordered him to stop the deportation of the Jews. This telephone conversation took place about noon on the 16th, and two hours later at 2pm, Hitler gave the order to stop everything immediately. Unfortunately, nothing could be done for the 1,000 people who had been arrested and were here in the College Romano. The Pope sent a member of the Secretariat of State to see what could be done about them but the man wasn't admitted, so nothing could be done. That was the true situation. Here again, you see that the intervention of the Pope was instrumental and providential in saving Jews. He regretted very much that he could do nothing for these 1,000 people who were miserably, brutally, criminally killed in Auschwitz.

### **What is the common theory of the Roman Jewish community today concerning the reason that the arrests were stopped?**

The details that I just told you are not commonly known, but they should have known that the Pope gave an order to open all 155 ecclesiastical houses in Rome. This is well known; they know it. Also, there is the fact that, for example, in 1946, there was the first general assembly of all the Jewish communities in Italy. And in Via Tasso, the famous prison and headquarters of the SS and Gestapo in Rome, they put up a huge marble slab on which, in a very moving way, they thanked Pius XII for all that he had done for the Jews in Rome during this terrible period. Unfortunately, the slab is no longer there, but I photographed it. It was published in certain publications, but rarely.

Recently the slab disappeared. I made an inquiry. I said, "What's happening?" They said, "Well, we restructured the whole thing and the slab broke, *etc.*" Maybe or maybe not. You must take into account the attitude of many Jewish people. They are not the people who lived under those conditions. They have fallen victim to mystification. They seem to have forgotten or they do not dare to speak out about it. That is the question: we have tried with certain people years ago, and there are still people alive who were sheltered in Roman houses. At times they were put in cassocks so that in case there was an invasion, they would be mistaken as priests. The women were clad as nuns. They were taught to say the Our Father and the Hail Mary—typical Catholic prayers.

If there were any neighbors close by, they were assembled in the chapel reciting these aloud, giving the impression that they were Roman Catholic priests and nuns. And then, of course, they had to be provided with food and everything because they had nothing—they had no ration cards, *etc.* There was real hunger in Italy. So to provide them with food was another serious problem for the Pope—to provide thousands of people extra food without rations.

### **This brings me to another point. There has always been a notion—in fact at Yad Vashem the placard states that it was because of the Pope's silence—that all the individual European bishops and priests were left to act independently from the apostolic household and universally sheltered as many Jews as possible during the war. Would you comment on this?**

If you allow me to use a very frank term, it is simply nonsense. For example, before all these problems started, before the German occupation of Rome: in the Palatine Guard, the noble guard, there were about 200 to 300 people. At the end of 1943 there were nearly 4,000 people in there, of

which 400 were demonstrably Jewish. Two hundred lived permanently in the Vatican; the other 200 lived outside the Vatican because there were no accommodations. The Vatican is very small. But they had official documents that they were in service to the Vatican and therefore came under international protection. Nobody can say that this could have been done without the Pope. And it is well known that many Jewish people besides these 400 took refuge in the Vatican.

The other thing is this: We know the names of those people who went around and alerted all the heads of the Roman houses in Rome. I'm speaking of churches, parishes, ecclesiastical convents, student houses, universities, *etc.*, and alerted them that it was the formal will of the Pope to help these persecuted Jewish people as much as possible. For example, a Monsignor O'Flaherty, Fr. Pankratius Pfeiffer, and Fr. Weber of the Pallotine Fathers. There is plenty of evidence. How can they say a thing like that? All these people have spoken up.

Of course, a Jewish scholar, Dr. Susan Zuccotti, said the Pope didn't do anything about it. The reason? There is no written document of it. Now this argument—excuse me—is downright stupid to argue because there is no written document signed by Hitler ordering the Holocaust. And this was the reason why a Holocaust-denier like David Irving claimed the Holocaust never took place. He said this could never have taken place without a written order of Hitler, and there is no written order, therefore the Holocaust didn't take place. This foolish argument has been refuted first of all—and rightly so—by Jewish sources.

Why is there no written document? Well, anybody who has lived under that period—even as a boy I knew this and had to be careful not to put anything in writing—knew that if there would have been a written document, it could have been spread all over. Any person on the street could at any moment have been stopped by the SS if it was known he had come from the Vatican. The Vatican was surrounded by troops or, at least, paratroopers. And if he was stopped, if they had found that paper on him, what would happen to the Church? If it would have been found in a convent, there was always the very great possibility that these convents would be invaded, and in certain instances it happened. It happened at St. Paul's, it happened at the Oriental College—they invaded it, found certain Jews, and arrested them. And people were punished for that, because harboring a Jew and sheltering a Jew was punishable by death. A number of people in Germany and Rome who sheltered Jews were killed for that very reason.

This is one of the things that Sir Martin Gilbert, a famous Jewish scholar, has pointed out. He said, "I personally am not absolutely sure that I would

have opened my door.” And these are decisions that people nowadays consider to be very easy: “If I had lived at that time, I would have done this, that, *etc.*” But this did happen to me, and I always look at these people and say, “I have neither the right nor the intention to question what you are saying. But please remember that you have not yet looked into death as I did under the Nazi regime. It is only at those moments that you can demonstrate what you are saying, and I hope for you that you will never be placed in such a situation.” And then they become a little more reflective.



**There's some information I discovered that I would like to ask you about. Sister Pasqualina was the nun in charge of the papal household. I was told—and maybe you could verify this—that she was actually running a group of little trucks.**

Before discussing and answering your question directly, it may be useful to tell you how I came to know Sister Pasqualina and what kind of relationship I had with her. We became through the years very close. This will substantiate what I'm going to say and the truthfulness of what I'm going to say.

In high school, I jumped two grades. I took the final examination when I was barely 17. From there I went immediately to university, and at the age of 20 I was a doctor of philosophy. So I joined the Jesuits only then, at the end of the war, because during the war it would have been too dangerous for them—not for me—to join them. After the two-year novitiate, I was sent as a teacher to a Dutch Jesuit college in Amsterdam, the College of St. Ignatius. Suddenly a telegram to the rector arrived that I should immediately within three days be in Rome to take the place of a 45-year-old philosophy teacher who became so ill at the beginning of the academic year that it was obvious he could never resume this activity.

It was very unusual that such a young person was ever called to Rome. We had no passports. All the passports issued in Germany before the end of the war had been declared invalid. So nobody could come from Germany, Austria, *etc.* I was living in Holland, and in Holland there was a diplomatic representation of the Holy See, an apostolic nuncio, which in Germany simply did not exist in 1947. So I got a Vatican passport, was sent to Rome, and took up my task there.

I was also acting at the same time as secretary of the director of this pontifical college. And it was

in that capacity that I got an internal phone call to go down to the parlor to see what a Sister wanted. Now this was normal—many people came in to ask for food or other things, so I usually was in charge of that. I met this Sister, and she presented herself as being Sister Pasqualina, the housekeeper of Pope Pius XII, and she came in that capacity. She said, “The Pope has sent me here. I wanted to speak to the rector.” She bluntly said, “You seem to be extremely young.” I thought, “Well, this person is very direct to say a thing like that to your face...”

She said, “I really come to ask whether in your library you have a certain book.” She gave me the title. I said, “I'm very new here; I have to go up and see. What do you want with it?” “The Pope wants it.” She told me that the Pope had a fabulous memory which I later would see for myself: When he was apostolic nuncio in Germany he remembered he had read a book which he now wanted, a book which he wanted to quote in one of his speeches. He had a habit never to quote anything unless he had seen the original text in front of him—never from second or third sources. She told me, “He even remembers the exact page of this book. Have you got it? If so, could you lend it to the Pope?” I said, “Of course, if we have it.” So I went up, and we found it.

That started a whole friendship. Not every week, not even every month, but quite frequently. And that's how I met her—we became well acquainted. When I had finished my task for the two-year period in the Pontifical German College, I studied for four years in England, then two years in Spain, and then returned again to the college, but this time in a much higher capacity as Acting Prefect of Studies. And we resumed our friendship, although this time she did not only ask books which were in our library—which was a very rich library—but rather whether I could obtain through my personal relations from national libraries in Germany certain books which were extremely rare. I asked her, “The Pope has an apostolic nuncio in Germany. Isn't it simpler to do that?” She said, “No, he doesn't want to draw attention to the fact, and he doesn't want to use his nuncios to come begging for things like that. So he prefers a private channel. He knows your family, he knows that you are capable of doing it. Can you do it?” I said, “Well, I'll try,” and I did.

This became much more frequent. This is the beginning of the friendship. Occasionally we had a little chat beyond these things. She was always in a hurry, but I asked her several things. Our friendship became extremely frequent after the death of the Pope. Something happened that should never have happened but did happen and not in this case alone. I've observed now personally several times that as long as a secretary of a Pope is acting, his master and lord is alive, people cater to him: this is normal.

It happens in other administrations, and although it shouldn't happen in the Church, it does. Therefore, if they want to get something, they are polite, cordial, even at times servile. I've seen it myself. But when the lord and master dies, the attitude changes. Then they are practically persecuted. This happened to the private secretary of John XXIII, it happened to the private secretary of Paul VI, and it happened to Sister Pasqualina. She had a very difficult time. It was Cardinal Spellman who saved her by putting her in charge of the household of the Pontifical North American College nearby.

But, of course, since we had met so frequently, she very frequently came to see me, and I consoled her because she was highly sensitive about this poor treatment that certain people gave her. Then she had time and I gave her time, and I learned many things. I asked her most specifically because I was interested what exactly she had experienced during the German occupation of Rome, being a German. She told me, among other things, and this is the exact answer to your question, that she herself drove around Rome with a little truck so as to provide foodstuffs, clothing, shoes, other things, necessities, soap, even toilet paper—God knows what—everything these people needed because they had nothing.

The communities in which they were living had to live on spare food and rations. Everything was rationed—even in 1947 when I came here that was the case. She told me that herself, without any pretense. She considered that to be the most normal thing in the world. She was also put in charge by the Pope of the papal warehouse. You see, the papacy, the Vatican, was neutral, and they got plenty of stuff from South America: meat from Argentina, train loads full of material came in from Spain, from Portugal, *etc.* This could reach the Vatican, and the Vatican didn't use it for their own purposes. The Pope was extremely sober in eating—he liked only a cup of coffee in the morning.

But since the Romans couldn't have coffee and there were tons of coffee in the warehouses, he renounced having any coffee at all. He didn't want any heating because the Roman people didn't have it. He didn't take any holidays because they couldn't afford it. So it was not for himself that all these foodstuffs came into the Vatican; it was to help the people who were starving, and to a larger extent it went to the people who were persecuted, who were in hiding, who had nothing and who could not be sufficiently fed, clad, *etc.*, by the people who sheltered them. She was instrumental; she was head of the warehouse.

### **So this absolutely shows that the Pope at the time was directly involved?**

Yes, I think so. What else could you expect? I mean, this could have not happened in the Vatican

without the Pope's knowledge, without his will. She explained to me that she never meddled in Church politics, and the Pope would never have tolerated that. Nor would she have ever dared to do this, because the Pope on this was extremely sensitive. And this never happened. But, as far as the helping of people was concerned, she was put in charge of the warehouse, and not all of the monsignors liked it. Before she was appointed, many things disappeared from the warehouse. Understandably, people had families in town and they were suffering from hunger—I'm not criticizing, I'm just stating the fact. But once she took over nothing disappeared because she was severe and precise—the typical German-Bavarian precision, if you wish. People didn't like it, and that made many enemies for her. Later, she had to pay for it.

### **I was told that the summer palace of the Holy Father, Castel Gandolfo, also had Jews sheltered there. Do you have any knowledge of this?**

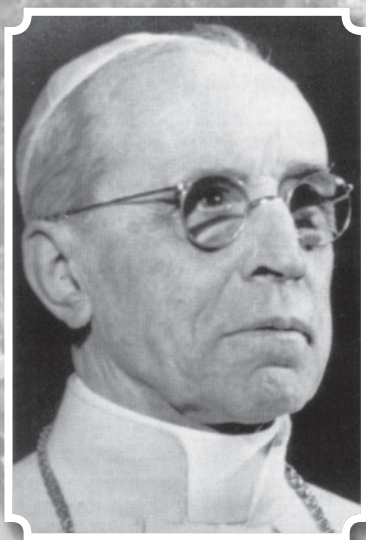
Yes, I have investigated that. Especially here, as a trained historian, I don't want to put in documents or investigate things that are not demonstrated. I had read in several Catholic publications that 3,000 Jews were sheltered at Castel Gandolfo. I was a little bit hesitant to believe that. So I got in touch with the director at Castel Gandolfo at the time and asked, "Can you confirm this?" And he said no. And he gave me the real story.

What really happened began with some refugees at Castel Gandolfo, but not to the extent above. But it so happened that when the Allied troops—American and English—were threatening to encircle Rome and were beginning to occupy the Albanian hills, the German military command, not wanting to get these civilians implicated on a battlefield, ordered them to leave their villages within three hours. Now where were these people supposed to go? Many of them decided to take refuge in Castel Gandolfo.

There was an iron gate there, but they forced it open, throwing it down, pushing against it, until 3,000 people entered. Of course, nobody thought about driving them out. And a number of them perished because, although this was a Papal domain, it was bombed twice with serious casualties. Now, can it be said that all these people were Jews? Definitely not. There may have been and plausibly were some Jews among them, but nobody could tell me how many. So that is an honest answer. We should not use arguments that are not correct and not demonstrated. ❏

(To be continued.)

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# POPE PIUS XII

## and the Attitude of the Catholic Church During World War II

**PART 3**

This is the continuation of the interview with Fr. Peter Gumpel, S.J., the relator of the cause of Pope Pius XII. This part of the interview focuses on more of the little-known history of World War II. It will be concluded in the next issue of *The Angelus*.

**We've learned through a Jewish journalist, Mr. Dan Kurzman, a very competent journalist who had interviewed General Karl Wolf, the Commandant to Italy and assistant and deputy to Heinrich Himmler, about the plot to kidnap Pope Pius XII. The plan—this was an actual plan that Hitler had put into place—was to arrest him and bring him to Liechtenstein or some place for his “safety,” then kill him and seize the Vatican and the assets of the Vatican. I'd like you to comment on this and give your knowledge.**

Yes, these facts are, to my knowledge, absolutely true. I've been in touch with Mr. Kurzman; he very graciously sent me his book. I've read it. I agree with his conclusions—maybe not every single

expression—but with his general tendency, definitely yes. The highest commander of the SS police forces in Italy, General Karl Wolf, indeed was heard when we made a canonical inquiry. The secretary of state knew he had once been received by the Pope, in all secrecy, and wanted to know more about that and his further activities. He was approached through an intermediary and agreed to make a statement under oath, which is in the acts of the cause of Pius XII's beatification. I have known these acts. He later even published certain parts of it, and I believe him. The personality of Wolf is not entirely unknown to me, because I already mentioned at the beginning that my mother was arrested and in serious danger of death and that somebody was sent to me when

I thought at first I was going to be arrested myself. This was Karl Wolf.

### **Was he a general?**

No, he was not yet a general, but he was the personal aide-de-camp of Heinrich Himmler himself. Therefore, at that moment, and ever since that happened to me, I felt that this man was not totally evil to say the least, that he was still human, that he was not bound to come to see me and to tell me, "I understand what a boy of your age has gone through, that's why I'm telling you this. But don't mention it to anybody." It's the same Karl Wolf. I had never met him in Italy because I came here in 1947, two years after the end of World War II.

### **He was in prison, wasn't he?**

He was not condemned by the Americans or by the English. He had gone to see Allen Dulles, the brother of Foster Dulles, the former secretary of state, who was heading the counter-espionage in Geneva, Switzerland. He communicated that he was planning to surrender the German army in Italy and Yugoslavia, which he did. As a *quid pro quo*, Dulles promised him that he would not be persecuted by tribunals in England, and, in fact, he was never taken to court by the Americans or the English. He was later condemned—it is true—by a German tribunal for certain papers he had signed with regard to the transport of Jews from Germany and France to Auschwitz. And for this he was condemned—and to a rather long period of imprisonment. But it was shortened on account of his health.

We contacted him after he had already been released from prison. So substantially I think the facts can be confirmed, which we also know from German sources. We are not only relying on Karl Wolf. But certainly when Mussolini fell on July 25, 1943, Hitler immediately gave orders to dislocate eight motorized divisions to all the aggressors between the German-occupied countries and Italy: France, Austria, *etc.* And then he said, "I'm going to arrest the King of Italy, Badoglio, who was the successor to Mussolini, and the Pope." And on that occasion he said in the presence of witnesses, "I'm going to invade the Vatican and arrest all the foreign diplomats who are sitting in there," which was true, "and I'm going to take care of the Pope." He was dissuaded at the moment by Göbbels and Bormann—Nazi leaders—not to do that because of the international reaction to a step like this. But he never gave up.

### **By "take care of the Pope" you mean arrest the Pope?**

Arrest him, yes. Meaning at least to deport him, to arrest him, yes. On the other hand, in the Vatican—I know this for certain by oral testimony—people believed that the Pope would be abducted.

The Pope himself was convinced of it. He got the advice from the Spanish government and from the Portuguese government to leave the Vatican and take refuge in their countries. And this was planned rather in detail about how it should be done. The Pope said, "No, I'm not going to leave my diocese. If they want to arrest me, they will have to carry me out by force." And then he added, and he told this to Cardinal Canali, Sister Pasqualina, Fr. Leiber and other people, "Whomever would leave the Vatican at that moment would no longer be Pope Pius XII, but Cardinal Pacelli." In other words, provisions had been taken that somebody else, another cardinal, would temporarily govern the Church because Pius XII would be impeded from doing so. These testimonies are clear. We also know that a number of high-ranking people were ordered to prepare their suitcases to follow the Pope. We also know that a number of foreign ambassadors had declared, "We are going to accompany him," out of loyalty to the Pope: the Finnish ambassador and others. So this story is not just an invention; it is true. And I think Mr. Kurzman has pointed out that this thing cannot just be simply dismissed as a fable as if some people had invented it.

**I would like you to just make a comment on what it was like within the Vatican during the war as far as leaks were concerned—spies and Nazi sympathizers, *etc.* All communications had to be done by either word of mouth or by code because, as I mentioned, we interviewed Msgr. Ferrofino, who said that the telegrams would come from the apostolic palace doubly encrypted, and he would have to do this all for secrecy. But comment possibly on the leaks that existed within the walls of the Vatican.**

Certainly, I think in all governments, and in all major political bodies, there is the danger of leaks. Think, for example, in America, about the Rosenberg couple who leaked top secret elements with regard to nuclear armaments. In England, Dr. Fuchs did the same thing with regard to the Russians, and other people like that. Therefore things like this happen all the time. They should not happen in an ecclesiastical institution, in religion, but they definitely do happen. They happened during the war, and they happen to this very day.

Let me give you a very concrete example. (You see I am very outspoken and honest with you.) When the Communists still occupied Romania, one of our own Jesuit superiors of that region succeeded—I don't know how he got leave, he didn't tell me—in going to Rome. He came to see me and said, "I need to see the Pope." And I said no. He said, "Why are you so determined?" I said, "For the very simple reason that I happen to know that if



you go there within an hour, the Romanian embassy for the Italian government will be informed about it. I will not expose you to that kind of danger. So what you're going to do, my dear Father, is sit down and write a report. I will see to it that the Pope gets it by hand. Without your signature or anything, typed over." He grumbled a little bit; he didn't understand. I said, "I won't expose your life to that. I know what's going to happen. If word comes to the Romanian embassy here, the next thing is you'll go back to Romania and, at the border, you'll be arrested. So don't push me, I'm not going to do it. That's it."

So, to your question, during the war, there were certainly spies, yes, but spies also in the English embassy to the Holy See. The butler there took advantage of the fact that his boss, the minister, every day took a walk in the Vatican garden to move a little; because the area was restricted, after all. And then he photographed all kinds of documents and passed them right on to the Italians and through the Italians, to the Germans.

And in the Vatican there have been people partly—there are many Italians in the Vatican, and certain Germans—for nationalistic reasons. Some people felt it would be their duty to do this. In other cases, some dark spot has been discovered in the life of somebody. And they put him under pressure. They say, "If you don't do what we want, we are going to reveal what we know." The third reason: material advantages, promotion, money—these are

all dishonest motives. But these things do happen. You must remember that in the Vatican there are not only priests, there are a number of lay people. They may have their own interests, they may have their own agenda, and there are also some priests who did things in the past at least—I hope they don't do it today—who in fact give out information which they should never give out.

A typical example is two people who spoke to Hochhuth and provided him with information that is first of all not correct; both of them were very much opposed to Pius XII: one, a bishop who had been deposed and exiled from Rome, living outside Rome now; and the other one, a junior member of the secretariat of state who was so convinced of his own capacity, he thought he was due to be promoted. The Pope knew his people and never promoted him to anything. And the man never forgave him.

And these are the two ecclesiastics to whom Hochhuth spoke. Now this is not exactly "spying" as you are referring to, but you see, the motives that some people can have in giving out information can be various and at times very dishonest. Unfortunately, I cannot deny that these things happened. I know for certain that they happened. There is even a book written on this, *Nothing Secret*, by Dr. Kaltefleiter, one of my collaborators, and the other co-author, Oswald, with whom I am also in contact, in addition to other spy books. Not spy stories, but ascertained facts...

**At the point when the archives are opened, what do you think will actually be found? I mean, based on the fact that all of this is living potential...**

Well, to return to your first question, if there would have been anything really damaging, you can well imagine that these spies would have found it and would have already sold it a long time ago. That is point number one: connecting the two questions together. The second point is: I think I know what is in these archives. I've never seen anything in there. I've been in frequent contact with the head of the secret archives, now Bishop Pagano, and with the head of the archives of the secretariat of state, a dear friend and fellow Jesuit. I didn't go there all the time, but I said, "Look, I want to see this, that, and the other thing, and, as investigating judge I have a right to do this." They both recognized this, and they sent me the documentation. And so that's how I found out. Now, I'm not a betting man. What I'm going to say may sound a little bit cynical, but it's my sincere conviction. I'm sure once the Vatican archives are entirely open, everybody can go there provided he has a doctorate or something like a journalist's credentials.

**They don't have to have a "library card" to go in?**

You need permission. It's a serious, important archive. I needed one when I was a student and, later, as a professor going into the archives. You need to have documentation that you are capable of doing research. Now, we hope that many of these people who are now claiming that there are secret documents hidden in the archives will go there. They are not going to find what they are looking for. But I'll bet you anything they will say, "Oh well, of course it *was* there, but it has been destroyed." This is cynical, but I think it's realistic.

**I want to get back to the Pope's apprehension of speaking out because there is a specific point. There were many, many thousands of Jews that were being protected under Vatican state territories, whether ecclesiastical facilities or otherwise. What is your impression of what the Pope was probably thinking in terms of the safety of these people? Had he spoken out or had he forced the hand to be actually arrested? Had he been arrested by Hitler?**

Some people have said—and I think, first of all, it is not demonstrated, and is even, in a certain sense, objectively malicious: "Oh, he didn't speak out because he was afraid for his personal safety!" Other people go beyond this a little bit and say that he was afraid the Vatican would suffer. That is not the decisive reason. The Pope personally was a very brave man. When he was Apostolic Nuncio in Bavaria, after the end of the First World War, the

Communists broke into the Nunciature, even though it was a diplomatic building. They broke in there and threatened him with a pistol pointed at him. He didn't back up one single step. He said, "Out with you! Out!" Therefore, he was not afraid, and he said so later.

He referred to this incident and other incidents when he was on the point of being attacked by the Communists in Munich during the Communist party's uprising in Munich during the uprising in 1919. Therefore, it's not that. The reason is simply and purely that *if* he had spoken out, the reaction of Hitler was foreseeable. And it would have seriously aggravated the situation. For example, during the occupation of Rome, imagine he would have come out with a public statement: "This is outrageous, this must stop." Hitler's reaction would have been to order the SS to invade all the convents, maybe even the Vatican, and to look for the Jews in there and kill them. And he was aware of that, and he didn't want to take that risk.

People say, "Why didn't he speak out?" What they forget is that he was advised by the Polish bishops—not by some Polish bishop who had taken refuge and left Poland at the moment of the danger, but by the Polish bishops who *stayed* in Poland—who said, "For heaven's sake, don't speak out, you are only causing damage." He once sent over a military man—a chaplain, the military chaplain for the Maltese Order, which was neutral—and sent hospital trains to take back people who were severely wounded to be taken to a hospital here in Italy, *etc.* He sent over things, pamphlets, to be distributed to the Polish clergy because in Poland there was very bad propaganda from the Nazis saying, "The Pope is with us; the Pope is against you," which was, of course, a lie. But people, if you continue to repeat something, become very dubious. He sent huge cases labeled "macaroni pasta," "bottles," *etc.*, but they were all filled with these writings. And they were taken there by this military chaplain and accompanied by a German officer so as to make it safer.

They went to the Archbishop of Cracow, one of the predecessors of the future John Paul II. He opened them and said, "For heaven's sake, what are you doing? If I distribute these things, even if they are not tied to me, there are not enough heads in Poland to be chopped off!" And in the presence of these two people who were flabbergasted, he threw everything into the fire. Therefore the Polish warned the Pope: don't say anything.

In the German concentration camps, where there were many priests and also many Protestant clergymen, if the SS treated them particularly badly, the Protestants would say to their Catholic confrères: "Did your big Pope perhaps open his mouth or your bishops say something to annoy Hitler?" and



so on. The German Resistance asked him not to do anything because it would hinder the Resistance since they continued underground to act against Hitler, finally bringing about this attempt on his life on July 20, 1944. But there were about twenty total attempts on the life of Hitler, and, nearly miraculously, he escaped. He had a sixth sense.

So, there were many people who said, "Speaking out doesn't help anything, so don't." And he was right in making this decision because it was a question of saving Jewish lives. Speaking out would not have saved a single life. It was demonstrated in Holland and on other occasions. Helping them in secrecy and not exposing the institutions of the Vatican to invasion saved thousands of lives.

In other countries like Hungary, where there was still an Apostolic Nuncio, Rotta, together with Wallenberg, saved, under formal order of Pope Pius XII, 20,000 Jewish lives by handing out fake certificates of baptism, by handing out letters of protection, *etc.* And here, it may be useful to say something, because sometimes people quote John XXIII against Pius XII, which is total nonsense. Pope John XXIII had the greatest admiration for Pius XII; I met him several times. But some people do not know; they try to establish an opposition between Pius XII and his immediate successor, John XXIII, who, during the lifetime of Pope Pius XII during the Second World War, was acting as a papal representative, first in Romania and Greece, later in Turkey. He did a lot to save Jewish lives, and he was praised for that by the Jews, thanked understandably and honestly.


But he always said, "Look, I acted only and exclusively under direct order of Pope Pius XII." When they tried to give the decoration of "Just among the Gentiles" to Msgr. Montini, who was one of the chief helpers of Pope Pius XII, he said, "No, I won't accept that. I did only what I was ordered to do, and you don't accept a medal for doing your duty." When the Bishop of Assisi, Nicolini, got the same decoration with his aide, Fr. Brunazzi, they always claimed, "Well, we did it because Pius XII sent a message."

You see, Dr. Susan Zuccotti, whom I've already mentioned, said, "Well, I know that Msgr. Brunazzi said that Bishop Nicolini of Assisi (where many Jews had taken refuge) had at a certain moment a letter in his hand, a written statement, and he said, 'This is what I received from the Vatican: help the Jews to the best of your capacity.'" And then they got going and saved several hundred Jewish lives. Not only in Assisi, but they were sending out messages to the people in the surrounding areas, *etc.*

Now Susan Zuccotti said that Bishop Brunazzi did not see the letter, practically saying that the bishop was lying. But why should a man who got the highest distinction of Israel tell a lie to these people?

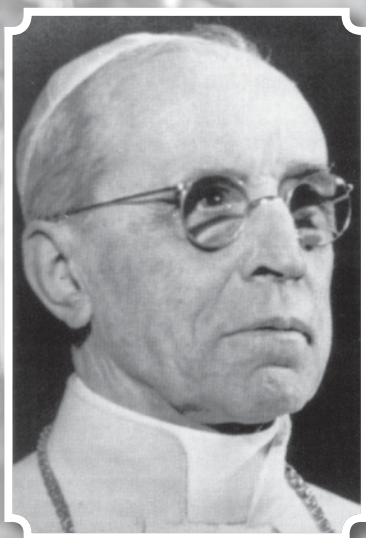
Isn't it outrageous that a Jewish personality of today accuses a man of such high merits for the Jewish people of a lie or fraud? This is, to my mind, from a scientific point of view but also from a human point of view, difficult to understand.

**I'd like to touch on a very prominent example of something that went on from 1939-45. Every six months the Pope would issue a telegram so that they could use an old ship to transport 800 Jews from Portugal to the Dominican Republic, and on to the US, Mexico, and Cuba. Msgr. Ferrofino said they would have to hand-deliver this telegram to General Trujillo, driving a day and a half from Port-au-Prince to the island. Then the General would say, "In the name of the Pope, we are going to allow this to happen." And this went on for many years and saved many thousands of lives. This is, as I see it, a very good example of direct intervention on the side of the Pope. Would you comment on any information you have which may be similar to this? In other words, were you aware of this particular situation?**

Yes, I was aware of it, and I even wrote to the state archives and ecclesiastical archives, both in Haiti and in Santo Domingo. But it appears that these archives are in a terrible state of disorder—which, given the smallness of the country and the general setup there, doesn't surprise me. You can't compare archives in Haiti and Santo Domingo with the huge archives in Paris, London, *etc.* Therefore, the case mentioned by Ferrofino was not entirely unknown to me, but he gave me a number of details that I did not know. The essential facts that he passed along the orders of Pius XII, that he got in touch with Trujillo, *etc.*, these things are published in a series of documents which so far I haven't mentioned. I refer to a 12-volume set published in French and Italian: *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*. In English, that would be, "Acts and Documents of the Holy See Relating to the Second World War." There are about 5,000 documents that were published between 1965 and 1982. And in these volumes, you will find several documents dedicated to the helping of persecuted people. And in one of these volumes this incident of Ferrofino and Trujillo is mentioned. Therefore the substance is there, but not all the details that I saw yesterday when you showed me what had been gathered in this very interesting interview with His Excellency, Msgr. Ferrofino. 

**(To be continued.)**

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# POPE PIUS XII

## and the Attitude of the Catholic Church During World War II

**PART 4**

This is the last part of the interview with Fr. Peter Gumpel, S.J., the relator of the cause of Pope Pius XII.

**I'd like you to comment on one of the things that is often cited as an authority in the United States, *Hitler's Pope* by John Cornwell. I'd like you to say a few words about your knowledge of the research done here, and then any background information you may have on this.**

Well, I can do so, even though I am not very enthusiastic about publicly making any facts regarding this gentleman which are not certain. The thing is this: I read one of his books, called *A Thief in the Night*. It takes issue with another book, written by David Yallop, who accused the Vatican of having murdered—poisoned to be exact—Pope John Paul I. Now this is a fable. I know why this happened: this Pope died completely unexpectedly at seven o'clock in the morning. I was called over to the Vatican,

where I found people in a chaotic panic. And the fact was that the tips of his fingers had begun to turn black, which was why people thought it was poison. It's not—there is a medical explanation which would take too long to explain.

So if you read the book, you will see that Cornwell refuted Yallop. But there are also many sniping remarks in regard to Vatican officials. Now, I knew this. At a certain moment, in 1998, I got a telephone call from the chief of office of the Secretary of State—the head of the British department there—“Would you be willing to receive a certain Mr. John Cornwell, who has written a book in defense of the Holy See, an excellent man, a practicing Catholic, *etc.*?” I couldn't say no.

With regard to recommendations, I am circumspect by nature. I never give

recommendations unless I am absolutely certain of what I'm doing. But especially with regard to certain clerics, who, out of the goodness of their heart, want to help a person in need, recommend them for certain posts, without being certain that they are capable of filling that post. So I am very cautious with recommendations that come to me from these kinds of circumstances. Now with regard to Cornwell, I wanted to know more about him before receiving him. I have several scientific collaborators in Britain, as in other countries. I called two of them, both trained historians, and said, "I have been requested to receive a certain Mr. John Cornwell. Now, I expect from you to be informed within the next 24 hours regarding what kind of academic degree the man has. Has he a doctorate in history? In theology? Law? Something else? Secondly, what is the general opinion—if any—about this person?"

Within 24 hours, I had two independent judgments. (Neither one knew about the other.) The judgment was similar: they both said he had no degree in any of those disciplines. He was not a university professor. He was a senior fellow at Cambridge University, giving the occasional seminar on the relationship between natural science and philosophy. But in history—absolutely nothing. Both of them added, independently: "Be careful, because he is known to be a man who mixes facts and fiction." Now, for an historian, that is a warning.

I received the man politely, as I do to everybody whom I receive, and I did something which I assure you was done without malice. I said, "You want to study these things? I can give you a series of documents if you are interested." I gave him an office and gave him the series which I've mentioned, of 12 volumes. I gave him a series of German documents: Dieter Albrecht, *Der Notenwechsel zwischen dem Heiligen Stuhl und der Deutschen Reichsregierung* [The exchange of diplomatic notes between the Holy See and the German government]. There were volumes.

I also gave him, on the formal request of the Secretary of State, the hundred testimonies we had collected for the cause of Pius XII. He returned in an incredibly short time—I thought he would be sitting there for hours and hours! I said, "You can come back in the afternoon if you wish." "No, I have finished." Later on, I found out he didn't know these languages. If I had done this on purpose, it would have been malicious and absolutely incorrect. But I frankly didn't know this. I thought the man was giving a seminar. So I did it in good faith, not maliciously.

But then he left. In 1999, I read in the *Sunday Times* (published in Great Britain)—and nearly simultaneously in *Vanity Fair* because my correspondents send me all these things—page-long articles signed by John Cornwell, in which he claims

he had worked in the archives of the Secretary of State for months on end. And among other things, he said he was the first ever to be allowed to work there. And thirdly, he said he had found documents that were kept in all secrecy lying there, as a time bomb. When I read that, as a pre-announcement of the book, I immediately called the director of the archive of the Secretary of State, a friend of mine. He said, "I will send you the photocopies of the book in which everybody who enters there signs." And he did: he sent me photocopies right away by messenger. So, from these results it was evident that he wasn't there for months on end. He was there for approximately three weeks. He didn't go there every day—of course not on Sunday—and sometimes for a very short period of time; other days, for several hours.

Incidentally, at that time, the archives were only open up to 1922. Therefore, it only included the Pontificate of Benedict XV, not Pius XII. Therefore he could at most cover the period of Pacelli only when he was a young prelate working as a Secretary of State and for his first five years as Apostolic Nuncio in Germany, but not the more important parts of it. Secondly, was John Cornwell the first and only one to be admitted? No, absolutely not. I had been there myself, so this was not an issue. The director of the archive said, "This is ridiculous." Third, the so-called "time bomb," the document studiously "hidden," lying there as a time-bomb, is a document which, in its entirety, had been published eight years before he ever went there, in the book of Dr. Fattorini, a female professor of history in a Roman University. It was published in its entirety.

### What document is that?

It is a document in which Pacelli describes what happened during the uprising of the Communists in Germany at the end of the First World War. But Cornwell has seen fit, in this relatively short document, due to his lack of knowledge of languages, to introduce no less than four very serious mistranslations. The document was in Italian. Of course, if you don't know the language properly, you ought not quote it, or else get some competent people to translate it for you. But to have four very grave mistranslations in a relatively short document! It's rather serious. As I said, the whole thing had been published, and it is by no means compromising—unless and until you change the text. I will charitably attribute it to his lack of knowledge of languages. There could be—I don't say *is*—a less charitable interpretation.



**This is the last question that I have, which is a very emotional question for Jews worldwide. Certainly during the war years, there were a lot of Catholic families that took Jewish children in. Sometimes what they would do, I know that there were attempts to get baptismal papers for many of these children...**

Yes, I know that story, because I was directly involved in it.

**I'd like your comments on that.**

Well, the whole thing really started—the upheaval started I can tell you—by an article published, I think it was exactly December 28th, 2004. An article published by the leading Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, an article written by Professor Alberto Melloni, who is professor at *La Sapienza* University, the one which recently came into publicity on account of the Pope's visit. The whole university is very left. This is obvious. Before he published this kind of thing, or he claimed to publish, the document sent by the Vatican to the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris. At that time the Apostolic Nuncio was Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII.

I read this article in the *Corriere della Sera* and immediately thought there was something very fishy. First, it is surprising that an Italian Secretary of State wrote to an Italian nuncio in French. This might have been something that happened during the war, as putting things into code was then common, but these were supposedly written much later, in 1947. There was absolutely no reason to put anything in code.

Secondly, there is no signature on the document. And thirdly, it seems to be very incomplete. So I decided to investigate this.

Now, this man did something that no trained historian should ever do: he did not precisely indicate his source. He merely cited "French ecclesiastical archives." Well, what French ecclesiastical archives? There are dozens. This was a very serious handicap.

Fortunately, the next day, the French newspaper *Le Monde* published a furious article by a lady who wanted to be kept anonymous but who said, "I see Professor Melloni has published the documents which I found in the archives." And she indicated the exact archive. She indicated that in this document a whole page was missing. Further, she had no idea how this professor came to have it since she had given it to a French scholar who intended to investigate the matter further.

It was a useful thing for me, that within 24 hours, without my doing, I was able to find out where exactly this document had come from. I was able to locate a telephone number, but when I called, I encountered my second setback: those who staffed the archive were on holiday and thus I had to wait!

In the meantime, I left a message for the Director to call me immediately. On January 7th, he did. He told me that he was not sure how even this lady obtained the document since the archives were closed. He said it must somehow have been stolen! Not necessarily by that lady, of course, but by someone. I told him that was all his business, but, under the circumstances, I inquired if I could have a copy. He replied, "Well, Father, it is a closed period. We have orders even from the French bishops not to hand out anything to anyone." So I replied, "Well, you know, I am investigating for the Vatican and am a somewhat high-ranking personality so I have a right to see this." He was hesitant and finally said he would make inquiries.

Finally he was convinced to release the document so that I could study it. We formed a team: Professor Napolitano, a professor of diplomatic history; Dr. Tornielli, a journalist with a solid scientific background; and myself. These two people published a book exposing the whole thing.

If you can see the alleged document coming from the Holy See, and you can compare it to the real document found in the archives, and you can compare it to the Italian version in the

Vatican archives, you see that the whole thing is a mystification.

Substantially, the orders given by Rome and sent to Roncalli, the Apostolic Nuncio in France, amount to this: Many Jewish children, even infants, have been entrusted to Catholic institutions. If the parents or close relatives reclaim them and can prove that they are the close relatives, the children have to be returned immediately, especially if they have not been baptized. If they have been baptized, of course, there is a problem. According to Catholic doctrine, a person who has been baptized in the Catholic Church becomes a member of the Catholic Church and has a right to be educated in the Catholic Faith. However, it is also a fair question to ask whether these children were legitimately baptized. The French bishops had given orders to all the convents, *etc.*, not to baptize any child unless the parents had formally requested it or given permission. Unfortunately, some less educated and overenthusiastic Sisters went against this order and baptized some children.

So what should be done with them? So the question became whether this illegitimate baptism was sufficient reason not to return these children to their relatives. But the real question was much deeper: what will happen to these children if nobody claims them? This was the intervention of the Chief Rabbi, Isaac Herzog. He visited the Pope and asked that all these children be returned to Israeli institutions. The Pope said he would study the matter and that he would do what he could, but the issue needed careful reflection.

The reason it needed careful reflection was the following: Take, for example, a newborn baby. Let us say it has been entrusted to a Roman Catholic family. He begins to grow up and believes the two adults taking care of him are his parents. The other children in the family he considers his brothers and sisters. Once a child reaches the age of four or five, can you tell him, "No, these are not your parents. You are going to be taken to an orphanage." That was the proposal.

After the terrible losses they had suffered in the Holocaust, the Jewish community understandably wanted as many Jews as possible to go to Israel to increase the population, *etc.* This is all very understandable. It is the right attitude. On the other hand, you must understand that, from a simply human point of view, there is this question: Can you do this to children? Will you not traumatize them? To take them out of a safe environment which they consider natural, tell them they do not belong, and put them into an institution. Therefore the solution was not to force the issue; each case was to be determined on its own merits. Let these children continue to live with their families—those without

relatives who were on the verge of being sent to institutions—

### **These are the children who were not claimed?**

Right. So it was decided to let them be until they were a certain age, perhaps 10 or 12 years old. Then, explain the situation to them very honestly without exercising any pressure and explain the advantages and disadvantages. Even a rabbi was called in to speak to them so they could hear the other side. And then, in those cases, let them decide.

### **Coincidentally, I happen to know two men, one of whom is in Rome, who found out they were a Jewish baby and who converted back to Judaism. The other is the Chief Rabbi of Serbia in Belgrade. He was raised in the Orthodox faith only to find out he was Jewish, so he became an Orthodox Jew.**

Yes, there is a great variety in these possibilities. If one of these children, however, after having lived in a Catholic family and being treated well, heard about his roots being so different, and after studying more about Judaism and having the opportunity to speak with a rabbi or other Jewish authorities, decides to return to Judaism, well, he is old enough to make these kinds of decisions now. He is not a little child who will be traumatized. This was the proposal.

In practically all circumstances, however, the children were returned at least to their parents. The famous French Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld, when this book was published and caused such a storm, said in his experience there were hardly any Jewish children who had not been returned to Jewish environments. And he, a Jew, is not particularly favorably disposed to the Roman Catholic Church.

There was one case, that of the French Finaly brothers, whose foster parents did not want to give them up after developing such an attachment to them. The matter was taken to court; the parents were condemned by the French court, and they were ordered to return them to relatives. And they refused. Then these children were taken to Spain. By order of the French bishops, they were returned, and it caused much sorrow to the Brun family. But obviously the relatives had the first right.

This was really something that could have been avoided if Melloni had taken care to investigate the matter properly. And not to rush to print based on a document of very dubious origin, mutilated, not written in the proper language, without a signature, *etc.* The assumption is that a less capable person who received the Vatican document made a summary of it in French, *etc.* 🗨️

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