

[Pope Pius XII: Hero in the Unmaking](#)[Print](#)

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The word “hero” so often conjures up images of the brash and the bold. We may think of Audie Murphy’s WWII exploits, the Spartans at Thermopylae, or the doomed holdouts at the Alamo. But then there are the quiet heroes, people such as Oskar Schindler. Ever since *Schindler’s List* hit the silver screen in 1993, his clandestine efforts resulting in the rescue of almost 1,200 Jews from Nazi death camps have been well known.

Yet that dark time birthed another quiet hero, one who saved as many as 860,000 Jewish lives. Today, however, few know of his accomplishments, few sing his praises. And Steven Spielberg will undoubtedly never make a movie lauding him. On the contrary, this man is roundly maligned as a WWII villain who was at best indifferent to the plight of the people in the Nazis’ crosshairs. This man is Eugenio Pacelli. But he is better known as Pope Pius XII.

By the lights of the popular culture and the increasingly unpopular media, it is a “fact” that Pius was practically a Nazi collaborator. British journalist John Cornwell’s book *Hitler’s Pope* got a lot of press after its 1999 publication, and self-professed “anti-theist” Christopher Hitchens never misses a chance to highlight the papacy’s supposed WWII sins and silence. It has become atheist boilerplate, the barbarous vehicle through which barbarian historians sack modern-day Rome.

Beliefs Not Borne Out

But the embrace of this impious Pius narrative extends far beyond activists and atheists, to people of good will. And one of them was a man named Gary L. Krupp. As a Jewish fellow raised in Queens, New York City, he had learned much about the Holocaust and knew who its main players were. He also knew who its monsters were — or, at least, he thought he did. He thus grew up “hating the name Pius XII,” as he put it. Yet he also had a certain passion: building bridges among people of faith by eliminating non-theological differences among religions. To this end he and his wife, Meredith, founded the Pave the Way Foundation (PTWF) in 2003. And, to this end — and despite his prejudices — the couple decided to investigate the story of Pope Pius XII.

After poring over literally thousands of documents during an exhaustive investigation, what the Krupps found was, to use Mr. Krupp’s characterization, nothing less than shocking. Far from being the callous Nazi sympathizer of many people’s nightmares (and some people’s fantasies), Pius was a hero who worked behind the scenes, quietly and diligently, saving lives and risking his own. Treating this matter just this past December in a *New York Post* piece entitled “Friend to the Jews: Pius XII’s real wartime record,” Krupp revealed some of what shocked him so, writing:

It is unquestionable that Pius XII intervened to save countless Jews at a time most nations — even FDR’s America — refused to accept these refugees.... He smuggled Jews into the Americas and Asia. He ordered the lifting of cloister for men and women to enter monasteries, convents and churches to hide 7,000 Jews of Rome in a single day.

Krupp provided a few more details in a *Daily News* piece entitled “Stop persecuting Pius — WWII pontiff is branded ‘Hitler’s Pope,’ but he did much to save the Jews,” revealing:

More evidence shows Pius secretly moved Jews out of Europe. We [at the PTWF] conducted dozens of video interviews, among them a witness account of a priest who revealed a secret “underground railroad,” directly ordered by the Pope, sending more than 10,000 Jews to the U.S. via the Dominican Republic. Many countries would not accept “Jews,” so they were given false baptismal papers to travel as Catholics. Pius successfully stopped the deportation of tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews when he appealed to the Regent of Hungary. Similarly, he desperately tried to impact the deportation policies of many other countries to, in his words, “save this vibrant community.”

Yet, while Krupp is currently the most visible of the pope’s defenders, he is far from the first. Another is Rabbi David G. Dalin, Ph.D., a widely published scholar of American Judaism and author of the 2005 book *The Myth of Hitler’s Pope*. He provided a trove of

information about Pius' efforts in his piece "A Righteous Gentile: Pope Pius XII and the Jews." And here is a small sampling:

Throughout World War II, he [Pius] spoke out on behalf of Europe's Jews. When Pius learned of the Nazi atrocities in Poland, he urged the bishops of Europe to do all they could to save the Jews and other victims of Nazi persecution. On January 19, 1940, at the Pope's instruction, Vatican radio and L'Osservatore Romano revealed to the world "the dreadful cruelties of uncivilized tyranny" that the Nazis were inflicting on Jewish and Catholic Poles.

... In June 1942, Pius spoke out against the mass deportation of Jews from Nazi-occupied France, further instructing his Papal Nuncio in Paris to protest to Marshal Henri Petain, Vichy France's Chief of State, against "the inhuman arrests and deportations of Jews from the French occupied zone to Silesia and parts of Russia."

The London Times of October 1, 1942, explicitly praises him for his condemnation of Nazism and his public support for the Jewish victims of Nazi terror. "A study of the words which Pope Pius XII has addressed since his accession," noted the Times, "leaves no room for doubt. He condemns the worship of force and its concrete manifestations in the suppression of national liberties and in the persecution of the Jewish race."

Pius XII's Christmas addresses of 1941 and 1942, broadcast over Vatican radio to millions throughout the world, also help to refute the fallacious claim that Pope Pius was "silent." Indeed, as The New York Times described Pius' 1941 Christmas address in its editorial the following day, it specifically applauded the Pope, as a "lonely" voice of public protest against Hitler.... The Pope's Christmas message of 1941, as reported by The New York Times and other newspapers, was understood at the time to be a clear condemnation of Nazi attacks on Europe's Jews.

Hitler's Nemesis

In fact, not only was Pius not silent, he was passionately opposed to Hitler at a time when many other notables — such as former U.K. Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Joseph Kennedy, J. Paul Getty, future Nobel Prize winner Andre Gide, and writer Gertrude Stein — supported the German leader. For example, a close collaborator of Pius' named Sister Pascalina and other witnesses reported that, while still Cardinal Pacelli, he said of Hitler, "Everything he says and writes has the mark of his egocentrism; this man is capable of trampling on corpses." Even more significant is a confidential letter sent to Washington by U.S. consul general A.W. Klieforth. Recording a 1937 conversation with Pacelli, he wrote (as rendered by World Over Live host Raymond Arroyo during a January 10, 2010 interview with Krupp), "His [Pius'] views, while they are well known, surprised me by their extremeness. He said that he opposed, unalterably, every compromise with National Socialism. He regarded Hitler not only as an untrustworthy scoundrel but as a fundamentally wicked person. He did not believe that Hitler was capable of moderation, and in spite of appearances would end up in the camp of left-wing Nazi extremists." The pope had also said, according to Krupp in the same interview, that it was better to lose young Catholics than to submit to Nazism.

Yet Pius' charitable behavior toward Jews (which merely reflected his charity for all) greatly predated, and outlived, the Nazi menace. Pius' closest friend growing up was a Jewish boy named Guido Mendes, and when Mendes' life was later imperiled during WWII, Pius would intercede and rescue him (Mendes' affection for his great friend was evident in an article he wrote the year of the pope's death). Additionally, to cite just a few more examples: As Nuncio Pacelli in 1917, he intervened with the Germans to prevent the Ottoman Turks from exterminating the Palestinian Jews; in 1930, he supported orders excommunicating anyone who joined Hitler's party; he threw his weight behind the defeat of a Polish anti-koshering law in 1938; and at the United Nations in 1947, Pius encouraged Catholic nations to support the creation of the state of Israel.

Then, returning to the fruits of the pope's wartime actions, I can add a somewhat personal note to this story. I had a Jewish relative who was a little girl in France during the Nazi occupation, and I had the opportunity to get to know her because she survived those harrowing days. And she only survived them because she was *hidden and protected by Catholic priests*.

Revisionist History

Now, all this runs so contrary to the modern Pius narrative that some may wonder where it's coming from. Is this a matter of revisionist history? It is — only, the revisionism occurred long ago.

If Pius was Hitler's pope, he sure fooled Hitler. As to this, *The Tablet* of London reported that Nazi leader Joseph Goebbels distributed pamphlets referring to Pius as the "pro-Jewish Pope." Then, after Pius' 1942 Christmas message, Germany's Reich Central Security Office issued a report stating, "The Pope has repudiated the National Socialist New European Order ... and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals." And, writes Sister Margherita Marchione, Ph.D. in her piece "Three Jews and a Pope," "The Nazi plan, reported in the July 5, 1998 issue of the Milan newspaper *Il Giornale* ... described Hilter's [sic] plan to 'massacre Pius XII with the entire Vatican,' because of the 'Papal protest in favor of the Jews.'"

And Pius must have fooled all the newspapers as well. Krupp points out that during the course of the PTWF's research, they examined hundreds of WWII-era articles on Pius and found not *one* negative piece. Thus, ironically, while the *New York Times* has given much ink and credence to recent anti-Pius books, it is contradicting the findings of its own WWII-generation reporters.

Most significant, though, are the pronouncements and behavior of a veritable who's who of WWII-era Jewish figures. For example, Golda Meir praised Pius, saying, "When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the Pope was raised for the victims." Albert Einstein was quoted in *Time* magazine in 1940 as stating, "Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth." Chief Rabbi Alexander Safran of Bucharest, Rumania, wrote in an April 7, 1944 statement, "In the most difficult hours which we Jews of Rumania have passed through, the generous assistance of the Holy See was decisive and salutary. It is not easy for us to find the right words to express the warmth and consolation we experience because of the concern of the Supreme Pontiff."

These voices were joined by contemporaries such as Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, Israel's first President Chaim Weizmann, Israeli Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, and Jewish historian Pinchas Lapide, just to name a handful. In fact, some prominent Jews actually suggested that a forest of 860,000 trees be planted on the hills of Judea in Pius' honor. The *pièce de résistance*, however, would have to be Israel Zoller, Chief Rabbi of Rome from 1939 to 1945. After the war, he actually converted to Catholicism and adopted the name *Eugenio Zolli* — in honor of none other than Pope Pius XII.

Given this, what do you call it when many today stubbornly insist they know better than every prominent Jewish voice of Pius's time? Well, Jewish folks have a word for it: chutzpah. To use another Yiddish term, though, how did all this *narishkeit*, or foolishness, surrounding Pius get started? Believe it or not, it began with one man, one day, and one play.

Pius' reputation remained intact until about five years after his death. But then on February 20, 1963, *The Deputy* opened in Berlin. Written by leftist playwright Rolf Hochhuth, it depicted Pius as a self-serving man who failed to act or protest during the Holocaust, a man who subordinated the inklings of the Holy Spirit to the spirit of expediency. The play would ultimately be translated into more than 20 languages, and its narrative would metastasize even more aggressively. It illustrates the influence one man can have.

Persecuting a Pope

Then again, if a story that broke in 2007 is to be believed, maybe it doesn't. That year, the highest-ranking communist intelligence officer to ever defect to the West, Ion Mihai Pacepa, claimed that the attack on Pius was no accident — it was Soviet agitprop. He revealed, wrote John Follain in the *Sunday Times* of London, "that he was involved in the operation code-named Seat12, a Kremlin scheme launched in 1960 to portray Pius XII 'as a cold-hearted Nazi sympathiser.' The result, according to Pacepa, was the 1963 play *The Deputy*, by Rolf Hochhuth." Oh, I should add that the motto of this Cold War plot was "Dead men cannot defend themselves." No, they can't — but men with dead souls can attack very well.

While the hard-left Hochhuth certainly needed no encouragement to write such propaganda (except, perhaps, for some convenient misinformation "finding" him), should Pacepa's story surprise anyone? After all, Pius and the church at the time were staunchly and explicitly anti-communist, and Catholic teaching specifically condemns communism. In fact, so effective was the church's opposition that Mikhail Gorbachev credited it as being instrumental in the fall of the Iron Curtain, saying in 1992, "What has happened in Eastern Europe in recent years would not have been possible without the presence of this Pope [John Paul II]."

The point is that the communists viewed the Catholic Church as a major (if not the main) impediment to their aims. Also remember that, as Soviet defector Yuri Bezmenov pointed out years ago, 85 percent of the KGB's resources were devoted not to intrigue but to *subversion*, efforts at, as he put it, "demoralization." That is, efforts such as the attack on Pius.

But as Bezmenov would also point out, most cultural havoc wreaked upon the West is done by Westerners to Westerners. Thus, however great (or minor) the communist influence over the character assassination of Pius, there is no doubt that it is covered with Western fingerprints. And why did so many glom on to *The Deputy's* malicious lies? Simple: The time was right. Secularist forces were on the march in the 1960s, hungry for any hammer suitable for bludgeoning traditionalist institutions. As University of Mississippi law professor and author of *Righteous Gentiles: How Pope Pius XII and the Catholic Church Saved Half a Million Jews From the Nazis* Richard Rychlak explained in a January 2006 *Zenit* interview:

Many of the critics [of Pius] share a view of the world that runs counter to the Catholic Church, and they have tried to advance their view and discredit the Church by denigrating Pope Pius XII.

Read through to the end of most of these [anti-Pius] books and you will find that the authors are critical not only of Pope Pius XII, but also the late Pope John Paul II, the positions expressed by Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, traditional Catholic doctrines of papal supremacy, the all-male priesthood and especially Catholic sexual teachings.

In fact, as Rychlak points out, the Catholic Church is being attacked for the same reason Christianity is always targeted: It advances the concept of Absolute Truth. For this reason, he writes, "it is their main target — not Pius or any other -individual."

It's Nothing Personal

In reality, many of Pius' critics couldn't care less about the pope any more than they do about the truth concerning him. Rather, he is a *vehicle*. If they can discredit the church by impugning Pius, they will do that; and if they could discredit the church by lauding Pius, they would do that. Moreover, there is no question in my mind that the agenda-driven, secularist critics care not a whit about the Holocaust, either. It is also a vehicle. And as an example, we need look no further than the impious playwright Rolf Hochhuth. To this day he is great friends with David Irving — the man who recently completed a prison sentence in Austria for Holocaust denial. In fact, Hochhuth was accused of anti-Semitism himself in 2005 when he defended Irving's statement, "More women died on the back seat of Edward Kennedy's car at Chappaquiddick than ever died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz," by dismissing it as black humor.

Then there is an irony here: If you're the church, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. Moderns lament those medieval days when popes and prelates melded with princes and politics, but then turn about and say that the church didn't do "enough" to stop the owners of arguably the most powerful military on Earth. But while nothing is ever enough to one bent on criticism, the days of a pope summoning Crusader armies to vanquish the barbarians du jour are long gone.

This brings us back to quiet heroism and Oskar Schindler. Krupp has pointed out that in Judaism "the highest form of charity is anonymous charity," and he says that this is what Pius is "guilty" of. Yet anonymous help is sometimes driven by necessity as much as nobility. Sure, we often like our heroes spitting in the eye of 1,000 devils while dodging 1,000 bullets, but bravery that kills innocents is no virtue. Many have observed that whenever the church spoke out, reprisals against Christians and Jews alike intensified. And this could only be observed because the church did speak out. This — and the fact that a dead savior saves no one — is the reason why, like Schindler, Pius had to work his miracles in secret. Unlike Schindler, though, who is admired for using a pretense of friendship with Nazis to save 1,200 lives, Pius is condemned for using an occasional pretense of neutrality to save the better part of one million.

Yet, in trying to correct the record here, one encounters a very difficult stumbling block. It's called the Big Lie technique. It was articulated by Adolf Hitler himself in *Mein Kampf* when he wrote, "It would never come into their [average people's] heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously." Now, what does it say about Pius' Machiavellian critics when, in order to paint him as a Nazi collaborator, they were willing to infamously distort the truth?

You can answer that yourself. As for the Big Lie that Pope Pius XII didn't do enough, we should ask the big question: Who did more? One of Pius' former enemies, Gary Krupp, knows. He put it this way, "Through our research of documented proof, we have discovered that secretly, he saved more Jews than all of the world's religious and political leaders combined." That is a big truth. It's big, it's beautiful, and maybe it will even be, one day, known.

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