



## The Pope's Jews: The Vatican's Secret Plan to Save Jews from the Nazis

By Gordon Thomas

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This revelatory account of how the Vatican saved thousands of Jews during WWII shows why history must exonerate "Hitler's Pope"

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Investigating assassination plots, conspiracies, and secret conversions, Thomas unveils faked documentation, quarantines, and more extraordinary actions taken by Catholics and the Vatican. *The Pope's Jews* finally answers the great moral question of the War: Why did Pope Pius XII refuse to condemn the genocide of Europe's Jews?

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“Many may find fault with the pope's decision to "keep silent" and not single out by name the Nazis or their crimes; however, Thomas is convincing in his revelations about the pope's secret work and relays how complex and sensitive these issues were for everyone involved at the time. Any World War II history buff or Holocaust researcher will find this book an important balance to existing historical scholarship.” *?Library Journal on The Pope's Jews*

“The reputation of Pius XII, pope from 1939 to 1958, has been subjected to criticism for the pontiff's alleged silence about the Holocaust. The best-known Pius-bashing title is *Hitler's Pope*, by John Cornwell (1999). In this rebuttal to Cornwell and other critics, Thomas recounts the period of maximum danger for the Vatican during WWII, from September 1943 to June 1944, when German forces occupied Rome, and Hitler sought to kidnap the pope. He also tried to capture the city's Jewish population, an operation that largely fizzled from the Nazi point of view, with most Jews eluding the dragnet (although about 1,200 did not). How the rest were saved is Thomas's main case for Pius, which he makes by narrating activities of local Jewish leaders, Vatican prelates, and German officers. When the SS sprang its trap, thousands of Jews had received shelter in Rome's churches, convents, and the Vatican itself. Suggesting that Pius was responsible for this, Thomas presents an earnest defense while sketching Rome's menacing atmosphere during the Nazi occupation. Pair this title with Ralph McInerney's *Defamation of Pius XII* (2001).” *?Booklist on The Pope's Jews*

“Gordon Thomas's new book *The Pope's Jews: The Vatican's secret Plan to Save the Jews from the Nazis*, is one of the few books that accurately reflects the truth of the terrible years of the War II based on primary source documented evidence rather than unsupported accusations. He logically assembles the jig saw puzzle of evidence and analyzes it with his personal lifelong wisdom, into an easy to read page turner. Mr. Thomas will be further sustained with the opening of the Vatican Secret Archives. I think this book should one day make a very exciting film.” *?Gary Krupp on The Pope's Jews*

“[Thomas's] book will ignite a contentious debate about the interpretation of his evidence and Pius's role during the Holocaust.” *?Publishers Weekly on The Pope's Jews*

“An episodic, fast-paced narrative.” *?Kirkus Reviews on The Pope's Jews*

“With knowledge cultivated by the serious study of espionage, Gordon Thomas sees through disinformation that has obscured the view of others. With the determination of a great investigator, he provides accounts that were previously unknown, and with the writing skills of a bestselling author, he breathes life into the story of Pope Pius XII and the Jews of World War II. *The Pope's Jews* is a riveting account of an immensely important but often misunderstood slice of history.” *?Ronald J. Rychlak, author of Hitler, the War, and the Pope and Righteous Gentiles on The Pope's Jews*

“A highly readable, and often riveting, book that gives a very good sense not only of the difficulties faced by the Catholics in saving their fellow Jewish Italian citizens but in surviving the daily obstacles of finding food for themselves.” *?Dr. Eugene Fisher, a leading Catholic scholar, The Catholic News Service on The Pope's Jews*

“In *The Pope's Jews* Thomas explores the controversy in depth, revealing dramatic new details. Thomas is

no ordinary writer: he is one of the most prominent political and investigative journalist of our time. What gives *the Pope's Jews* such power is its immediacy. The heroes were many – even though now long forgotten – but Thomas' book brilliantly brings them back to life, paying them homage and providing some long-overdue recognition. All Jews and Catholics – and not only them – should read this vitally important book.”  
*?William Doyno, contributing editor Inside the Vatican on The Pope's Jews*

“Thomas is convincing about the Pope's secret work.” *?Social Science on The Pope's Jews*

“The Pope during World War II supposedly did little as Europe's Jews were exterminated wholesale. Gordon Thomas sets out to debunk that notion. *The Pope's Jews* show how Pius oversaw a covert network of priests, nuns and Roman citizens who forged documents and smuggled Jewish refugees to Switzerland, the United States and Palestine while Vatican infirmaries became hiding places. The Pope was considered such a threat that Nazi officials hatched a plot to kidnap him. All the while he had to keep the Germans from finding out about the secret operations that saved hundreds of lives.” *?The Washington Post on The Pope's Jews*

“*The Pope's Jews* offers an extraordinary well-researched account as well as a magnificent portrait of the refugees, the residents of Rome's ghetto and Rome's Catholic community. In doing so Thomas has provided a most welcome addition to the fight to preserve Pius' good name. This book follows the timeline of events as they actually occur: headline making events as the Ardeatine massacre , Hitler's demand for gold, the bombing of Rome by Allied planes and the battle for Rome. To his credit the author lists his sources. In Thomas' *The Pope's Jews* there is little reason to expect the opening of the archives will alter the end results that the Catholic Church under Pope Pius' leadership, rescued more Jews than any other institution or government.” *?Bill Loughlin, The National Catholic Register on The Pope's Jews*

“Thomas' riveting narrative relates the wartime decision in regard to the Jews made by Pope Pius XII. He cites the Pope's orders to open convent and monastery doors to harbour Jews, issuing Vatican passports that allowed thousands of German Jews to leave Nazi Germany. As Thomas notes "the wartime files will fully end the controversy about 'Hitler's Pope' and silence the argument that he is not worthy to become a saint of the Roman Catholic Church.” *?Jack Fischel, The Jewish Book Council of America on The Pope's Jews*

“Literally impossible to put down.” *?The New York Times on Gideon's Spies*

“Tells it like it was--and like it is.” *?Meir Amit, former Director General of Mossad on Gideon's Spies*

“A compelling read, with any number of disturbing revelations.” *?FHM on Gideon's Spies*

“Authoritative history of Britain's spy services by a veteran who has been writing about "the Great Game" for fifty years [and a] well-written page-turner that demystifies the notoriously foggy "wilderness of mirrors.” *?Kirkus Reviews on Secret Wars*

“A fine depiction of the multifaceted context of this cause célèbre.” *?Kirkus Reviews on Operation Exodus*

#### About the Author

GORDON THOMAS is a bestselling author of forty books published worldwide, and a leading expert on the often sinister world of secret intelligence. He lives in England.

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## A WAY TO DIE

On that cheerless winter morning, February 10, 1939, Eugenio Maria Guiseppe Pacelli stood in the bedroom doorway, watching what was happening around the brass-framed bed. The two middle-aged nuns went about their work with the gentle movements he expected. Dealing with the dead was something years of experience had given them. For Pacelli dying was a guarantee of afterlife. Long ago he had learned that promise from his mother, Virginia, a pious daughter of the Roman Catholic Church.

Her son was His Eminence, the cardinal secretary of state of the Holy See, the second most powerful figure in the church. An hour ago, following the death of the old man in the bed, Pope Pius XI, Pacelli had become the most important figure in the entire Catholic world. He was now the Camerlengo, a position which combined the role of the Vatican treasurer and chamberlain of the Holy See. He would be responsible for organizing the funeral of Pope Pius XI and the conclave to elect a new pope.

Pacelli was sixty-four years old, of medium height, and slim with a typical Roman nose—straight with narrow nostrils and a slight bump in the middle of its ridge. Behind his old-fashioned spectacles was the look of a man who understood a situation at once.

Through the closed window of the bedroom high in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, from two hundred feet below, came the murmuring of the crowd in St. Peter's Square, praying for the soul of Pope Pius XI, the church's 261st supreme pontiff. For twenty years he had held numerous titles, offices, and power which had directly affected the lives of many millions of Catholics. For days Pius had been at death's door, barely kept alive by the drugs his doctors administered. They had left the bedroom, their work finally over. Soon Pacelli would begin his.

Pacelli continued to watch the body, still clad in its white nightshirt. A nun had removed the bed socks the pope had worn because of his poor blood circulation, one of his many medical ailments. He was eighty-one years old, his skin taut on his skull, his hair wispy gray, and the veins stood out on the back of his hands. His eyes had been closed; no longer would they look with gentle inquiry.

Only days ago they had looked at Pacelli as he had sat at the bedside and they had spoken on a familiar subject, the fate of the Jews, or, more precisely, that of Guido Mendes and his family. To the pope and Pacelli they represented what was happening to Jews in Germany and Italy, in all those countries where anti-Semitism was spreading.

Guido Mendes was the son of a Roman Jewish family whose lineage went back to Fernando Mendes, the court physician to King Charles II of England. Eugenio had sat next to Guido at school and later in college. By then they were close friends; Eugenio was a regular guest at the Mendeses' Sabbath dinners, Guido had his place at the Christmas Day Pacelli table. By the time Eugenio began to train for the priesthood and Guido had entered medical school, Eugenio's circle of Jewish friends had widened to a dozen. They came to his ordination and watched him celebrate his first Mass. He had walked with them around St. Peter's Square, pointing out the various statues of saints on top of Bernini's colonnade. They had taught him basic Hebrew.

In a lifetime of travel when Pacelli returned to Rome he always made a point of inviting his Jewish friends to meet him. Increasingly they had questioned him about the treatment of Jews and he had told them what he had seen and heard had pained him and promised he would fight anti-Semitism with all the power he had. That authority had reached its peak when Pacelli was appointed secretary of state in 1930. He had invited Mendes and his other Jewish friends to attend the ceremony and afterward introduced them to Pius XI. On what was to be their last conversation before the pope had died, Pacelli had told him the Mendes family was now safely in Palestine. Until a year ago Guido had been a professor of medicine at the University of Rome medical school until Mussolini's anti-Semitic racial laws had led to his dismissal. Pacelli had immediately asked the British minister to the Holy See, Sir D'Arcy Osborne, to provide the family with entry permits to Palestine, then a British mandate. Osborne's readiness to help had started a friendship with Pacelli that would last.

Afterward Pacelli had also arranged for a number of other eminent Jewish scholars, doctors, and scientists to

emigrate to the United States, South America, and other countries. He arranged for those who could not leave Rome because of family reasons—a seriously ill wife or a child at a critical part of his or her education—to have posts in the Vatican. They included a world-ranking cartographer, Roberto Almagia, who produced a monograph of the Holy Land. Since the racial laws twenty-three Jewish scholars were found positions by Pacelli in the Gregorian University, the Academy of Science, and the Vatican library. On his deathbed Pope Pius XI had spoken of the need for Pacelli to continue his campaign against anti-Semitism.

One of the attending doctors would recall that Pacelli was close to tears as the pope said he must continue to be a defender of the Jewish people.

\* \* \*

The nuns had completed their work and murmured the traditional words: “O Lord, I raise to you my prayer...” Below in the square came the sound of traffic and police setting up barriers to control the growing crowd gathering to mourn the passing of the pope.

Pacelli continued to gauge the moment for him to walk over to the bed. The emotions aroused by death were already settling over the bedroom. The faces of the two nuns were mournful, their voices soft as they prayed. Beyond the window the first rays of the sun passed above the limpid Tiber to touch the cross on top of the basilica of St. Peter. From the square the sound of prayer grew louder. Pacelli walked into the bedroom pausing only for the two nuns to leave. He stood beside the bed and delivered his own prayer.

\* \* \*

As dawn began to lighten the sky beyond the bedroom window, Pacelli knew that before he could begin the funeral preparations and settle a thousand matters before a new pope was chosen in conclave, he must perform his first duty as a camerlengo. He removed the Fisherman’s Ring from the pope’s right index finger. Later he would use silver shears to break the ring in front of the assembled College of Cardinals before they went into conclave. When a pope was elected he would receive his new ring, a further symbol of his authority.

Pacelli bent over the body and kissed the forehead and hands before leaving the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

\* \* \*

His office was on the third floor of the Apostolic Palace. At that early hour the view from any of its windows was impressive. Stretching into the distance were the domes, spires, towers, monuments, palaces, and parks of Rome. To the right of the windows rose the basilica; long ago, when Pacelli had become a fully fledged diplomat, he had memorized its proportions: 651 feet long, 535 feet high, with 71 supporting columns, 44 altars, and 395 statues. He found the details useful in making polite talk at official functions. To the left of the windows was the roof of the Sistine Chapel, offering no clue to the splendor inside. It was there that the cardinals would elect a new pope.

Pacelli sat at a sixteenth-century desk made in the days of Paul VI. It had a hand-tooled leather writing pad, a small clock in a solid-gold frame, a gold-top roll blotter, and a letter opener. They were gifts from his family to celebrate his appointment as secretary of state. One wall was covered with shelving holding leather-bound volumes of Vatican canon law and treaties Pacelli had worked on.

Pacelli placed his first telephone call of the day through one of the nuns who manned the Vatican switchboard. In moments he was connected to Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, informing him that the pope was dead. Having expressed his condolences on behalf of the government, Ciano told Mussolini. The duce had replied, “At last the obstinate old man is gone.”

Throughout the day the camerlengo had sent the same message to apostolic nuncios around the world. “Deeply regret to inform you Holy Father passed away. Inform all relevant. Yours in Christ, Pacelli, camerlengo.”

Across the world the first wire-service reports of the death were appearing in newspapers. In the office of *L’Osservatore Romano* in a featureless building near the Porta Sant Anna, one of the gateways to the Vatican, the editor, Count Giuseppe Dalla Torre, was preparing the next edition which would be entirely

devoted to the pope's death.

\* \* \*

The winter sun had risen over the Vatican when the two Swiss Guards entered the bedroom of Pope Pius XI. They moved his body off the bed, onto a trolley, and draped it in a purple cloth. The two guards wheeled the gurney to a nearby service elevator and took the body down to the basement of the Apostolic Palace and through the corridors to a room beneath the basilica. Waiting there was the undertaker appointed by Camerlingo Pacelli to prepare the body for lying-in-state in St. Peter's.

\* \* \*

That night Pacelli sat at his desk and read the messages which had come from papal nuncios in Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague. All told the same story: Throughout the Third Reich the persecution of Jews not only continued but had increased. In the German capital Hitler had told a rally there was a need to find a solution for the "Jewish problem."

When he finished reading, Pacelli drafted a message to all the nuncios in the expanding Third Reich. He had prayed for guidance before instructing them on an issue which had been raised on behalf of the German church: W...

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