

## **Reckoning with History: Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust**

A Discussion with Prof. David Kertzer, Professor of Social Science at Brown University, and Fr. John Pawlikowski, founding faculty member of Catholic Theological Union, moderated by Maharat Rori Picker Neiss, Executive Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of St Louis

Introduction by Prof. Marie Griffith, Washington University in St. Louis

Discussion held on Zoom

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6:00-7:15 p.m.

### **Griffith:**

.... the Jewish Community Relations Council here in St. Louis, the Bernadin Center at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. Today's conversation is also supplemented by the documentary film *Holy Silence* released in January 2020. It's a film that chronicles the Vatican's reaction to the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany and how Pope Pius the XXII in particular, responded to the horrors of the Holocaust. And it also includes the very interesting contrast between Pope Pius the XI and his successor on this question. If you registered for tonight's event, you should have received an email with a link for a free viewing of that film and we know that many of you have watched it. It's also fine if you haven't yet watched it, you can still understand the conversation tonight, but trust me that you'll want to do so after this discussion between Professor David Kertzer who is featured prominently as an expert in the film and Father John Pawlikowski. So let me introduce both of our discussants now, along with our moderator Maharat Rori Picker Neiss. Pulitzer Prize winning author David Kertzer is the Paul Dupee University Professor of Social Science at Brown University. His most recent book, *The Pope Who Would Be King*, tells the dramatic story of the Roman Revolution of 1848 when the Pope was driven into exile and the end of the Papal theocracy was proclaimed. Kertzer's previous book, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius the XI And the Rise of Fascism in Europe*, won the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 2015 and the American Historical Association prize for best book in Italian history. Kertzer's previous books include *Amalia's Tale*, *Prisoner of the Vatican*, and *The Popes Against the Jews*. Kertzer's *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, was a finalist for the National Book Award in 1997. Kertzer is an authority on Italian politics, society, and history, political symbolism, and anthropological demography. He is Co-Founder and served for many years as Co-Editor of The Journal of Modern Italian Studies. In 2005, Kertzer was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and from 2006 to 2011 he was the Provost of Brown. John Pawlikowski is a member of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary or Servites and he was ordained at the University of St. Mary of the Lake. One of the founding faculty members of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, he served on the faculty from 1968 until his retirement in 2017. He is the author of ten books including, *The Challenge of the Holocaust for Christian Theology*, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, and *Jesus and the Theology of Israel*. He is former director of the Catholic-Jewish studies program, a part of the Bernadin Center for Theology and Ministry at CTU. Father Pawlikowski has been an active participant in the Christian-Jewish dialogue as well as the wider inter-religious dialogue for nearly fifty years. He served for six years as President of the International Council of Christians and Jews and has served several terms on the board of the Parliament of the Worlds' Religion. He was deeply

involved in the development of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and was appointed to the memorial counsel in 1980 by then-President Jimmy Carter and he was subsequently reappointed by Presidents George HW Bush and Bill Clinton. Tonight's moderator is Maharat Rori Picker Neiss who is the Executive Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis, prior to that she was the Director of Programming, Education, and Community Engagement at Bais Abraham Congregation in University City. She is one of the first graduates of the pioneering institution training Orthodox Jewish women to be spiritual leaders and Halakhic authorities. She previously served as acting Executive Director for Religions for Peace USA, Program Coordinator for the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, Assistant Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee and Secretariat for the International Jewish Community on Interreligious consultations, the formal Jewish representative in international interreligious dialogue. Ok so the central question we're addressing here can be expressed in simple terms although it's not a simple issue at all. Could the Catholic church have done more leading up to and during the Holocaust? Did church leaders at the very highest level abdicate their own principles and their responsibility to confront and resist the untold suffering and death of millions of people? Might some Catholic leaders even have supported the Nazis and been indifferent to the plight of Jewish victims? Or, did Catholic leaders at the Vatican work behind the scenes to save thousands of Jews both locally and across Europe while trying not to bring undue attention upon the church from the Nazis? Was Pius's silence necessary to keep the church safe and prevent the Nazis from bombing Vatican City? As the film *Holy Silence* documents clearly, Pope Pius the XII who headed the church from 1939 to 1958 insisted upon a stance of total neutrality during WWII, refusing to publicly criticize Hitler's anti-Semitic policies well after the mass killing of Jewish men, women, and children was well known. The "Holy Silence" that is, was his and it reverberated widely within the Church. Some eighty years later, many now seek a reckoning. Just over a year ago, in March 2020, the Vatican opened its archives covering the papacy of Pius the XII. Just to be clear, thousands of Vatican documents from the war era had already been released in recent decades as the Vatican fought rumors that Pius had collaborated with the Nazis and the fascists but many more were sealed until last year when the full archive was made available to researchers. Writing of the importance of this release, Professor Kertzer noted Holocaust denial might be dismissed as the delirium of a crackpot fringe, the denial of responsibility for the war and for the Holocaust remains widespread in Europe and in the Christian churches. A few months after the unsealing, Professor Kertzer reported on these newly available documents in a stunning article in *The Atlantic* which was published last August. These documents, which are millions of pages that will take years to fully comb through, promise to tell us more about the Pope's silence, his refusal not to protest even after the Germans rounded up and deported Rome's Jews in 1943, taking them to Auschwitz where most of them died. The newly available documents, Kertzer tells us, illuminate private conversations, the internal wrangling of Vatican leaders over whether the Pope should protest these deaths or not. Monsignor Angelo Dell'Acqua prevailed, arguing that it was quite opportune to be wary of the Jews' influence, government laws should be used to restrict the rights of Jews, this was necessary to protect Christians from alleged Jewish crimes. As Dell'Acqua wrote, "there was no in the lack in the history of Rome of measures adopted by the Pontiff to limit the influence of the Jews". The Pope remained silent. Some years later when the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Isaac Herzog, begged the Pope to help get the missing Jewish children orphaned by the Holocaust, many of them now baptized Catholic, returned to Jewish guardians by issuing a call for their release, Dell'Acqua advised the Pope not to make any such statement

nor really do anything at all and Pius apparently took his advice. Few Catholic thinkers have worked as hard to address the challenge of these painful events to the church and the challenges of historical antisemitism to Catholics more broadly as well as the silence that enables all racisms, than Professor Pawlikowski and I am profoundly grateful to you, Father, for your honest engagement with issues and realities that I know bring sorrow to Catholics. And Professor Kertzer I am profoundly grateful to you for your own crucial work that makes it impossible for us to avoid or deny these hard truths. All of us undergo reckonings of different kinds, great and small, and they are hard. However beloved Pius the XII may be to many Catholics still, this is a reckoning that must be had at every level of the church. And now let me turn things over to Maharat Picker Neiss for this discussion.

**Picker Neiss:**

Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Griffith, and thank you to all of you for joining us. I'm really so delighted to host two such prominent scholars on this issue and to be part of this conversation. So let me say we are going to try and keep this as a conversation as much as possible I do know that there is numerous of you who are watching and I will be looking at the chat and the Q&A and trying to incorporate questions as we go. Let me start off with this really big question for the two of you and either one of you is welcome to start, so Dr. Griffith really framed the issue for us in terms of the history but I want to really push us in terms of saying what's at stake in this conversation. Why are we talking about someone who died over sixty years ago, something that happened over seventy years ago, what's at stake for us in talking about this?

**Pawlikowski:**

Well let me begin, since the question was what is at stake particularly for the Catholic Church, I think put in a single word I would say integrity. Integrity based on authentic transparency. I think we need to try to delineate what Pius the XII did and more perhaps what he didn't do, through research in the archives which as you already indicated, will be a monumental effort that may take as much as a decade. Let me just comment there actually is not a single archive. What we're talking about right now in terms of the release of documents, cover about five or six archives and it becomes more complex because access to the archives requires access to and permission to look at each of the archives. There is no overarching permission to look at all of them so it becomes a very complex process to even get access to them and it's been made more complicated by the COVID crisis which has closed the Vatican archives several times in recent months. But for me especially coming to the discussion from the standpoint of someone specializing in social ethics, I have to ask the question, what are the implications of the way Pius the XII handled one of the most fundamental moral crises facing the Catholic Church? And I think the problem that we already know is a reality in the way that he did handle it is the fact that he was very much of a Pope dedicated to the idea that in fact his job was to protect the self-interest of the church and its operations as his primary responsibility. Protecting the human rights or the lives of other people, especially those who are not Catholic, was not a high priority for anyone, with some exceptions, but for most people in the Catholic Church of his time. The movement of those kinds of issues to the center of Catholic responsibility is something that primarily occurred in and through the Vatican council and the subsequent writings and discussions on that, and that continues today. But Pius the XII, I think, saw his role as in a very diplomatic way. I think it's terribly important to remember that he inherited diplomacy in his mother's milk, if I can put it that way, his father was a very committed Italian diplomat and

loved the idea of the old Papal states. I think most Catholics are not aware that the Catholic church was not just a religious institution, it was a very real political institution during the period of the Papal states which of course collapsed in the face of revolutionary Europe. But his father was very very upset about the demise of the Papal states and really experienced some new joy when in 1929, the Vatican mini-state was reestablished. But Pius the XII grew up in the atmosphere of diplomacy, he was targeted for the Vatican diplomatic court even before his coronation, and he really imbued that sense of what it meant to Pope. It meant to be the chief diplomat of the Church. This doesn't mean that he didn't do some things, but I don't think that saving Jews or even saving Poles during the Holocaust, who also sought his assistance and were very angry that he, by and large did not offer such assistance. This was not from his point of view, his main responsibility and I think what we really need to ask in today's church is what do we do in times of grave social crisis? What is the role of religious leadership in such times? There was a very interesting counterexample that took place in the small African country Malawi, about a decade or so after the, probably more than that, but within the first few decades after the actual Nazi Holocaust had ended and there the president Dr. Hastings Banda tried to literally exterminate people who practiced indigenous religion and the Catholic bishops of the country, most of them foreigners, to a person stood up and said, "You cannot do this. This is wrong. You must stop the killing". And he said to them, "I will destroy your churches and I will kill your caduceus" which certainly would bring down the structural stability of the Catholic church but they said to go ahead. I think this was a counterexample to the cautious diplomatic approach to the whole Nazi era that I think motivated Pius XII and is something that we have to seriously question in today's Catholic church

**Picker Neiss:**

Thank you.

**Kertzer:**

Well, you've hit on many points that we could discuss and maybe we'll get a chance to discuss some of them but let me just go back to this larger question of what's at stake. I see it in terms of what accounted for the Holocaust, I mean this is part of what's at stake, how could it have been possible in the middle this, and I think I said in the film, in the middle of the twentieth century, what had been regarded as one of the most advanced civilizations in world history, certainly in European history, that tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people could have felt that murdering Jewish children and old people and women and so on was a good thing to be doing. From my point of view, Pope Pius is a crucial figure but it's even beyond the personality of Pius the XII and his strong points and limitations. John Paul the Second because of the controversy over the silence of the Pope called on a Vatican commission to look into this question of whether the church bore any responsibility for the demonization of the Jews that could've led to the Holocaust. And after practically a dozen years this commission produced the report in 1998, called "We Remember" people can look it up online if they are interested. And what it basically said was that unfortunately it's true there had been negative religious ideas about Jews for many centuries in the church, not just the Catholic church but the Christian churches in general, but this had nothing to do with the kind of demonization of the Jews that led to the Holocaust, that was something more modern, was racial and so on. This is just not real history as a historian, it's a kind of a wishful history. So the question from my point of view is not just about the silence of Pius the XII during the Holocaust, but how the Holocaust could've taken place, and one of the

reasons, I think is unrecognized, and I have been working on these newly opened Vatican archives, one of the reasons that hasn't been recognized for the Pope's silence is that he was afraid, it wasn't that he was afraid only that the Nazis might take action against the institutional church if he were to be critical of them, he was afraid of Catholics in Germany that many many of them were Nazis, were loyal Nazis, and that he could produce a schism in the church. And there had been something of a schism in the Protestant churches in Germany along these lines. There're some very crucial questions here that put into even larger perspective as someone who works in Italian history, it's not just that the Catholic church has had a hard time coming to terms with this history, it's Italy, for example, as well. The fact that Italy was part of the Axis powers and the ally of Hitler is not an impression you generally get when you talk to Italians who'll talk about the resistance, which is celebrated on a kind of resistance anniversary April 25. The fact that the Italians were in fact allied to the Nazis, Mussolini would have been in power much longer if they had actually won the war, as most people including the Pope thought they would, which is the other aspect in trying to understand why Pius XII remained silent and wouldn't criticize Mussolini or Hitler. He thought they were going to win the war, as did many people, for good reason given how rapidly the German army advanced at first through Poland and then through the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, and drove the British, famously at Dunkirk, off the continent. So, this is all part of a much larger coming to terms with history.

**Picker Neiss:**

So, building off of that, I was saying just before, some people came on if you were here for sort of the chitchat beforehand, I was saying that I remember when I first started working in Catholic Jewish relations which was my first foray into interfaith work, it seemed like this was the big topic of conversation, it was about the archives of Pope Pius XII and the canonization of Pope Pius XII. But to be really honest, when I first started talking about doing this program and bringing the two of you together, there were some people who pushed back at me and said we shouldn't be doing this and that this might really be upsetting to Catholic-Jewish relations, that this would be offensive to our Catholic partners to raise this question. And so, I'm curious Father Pawlikowski if you can comment, as somebody who's done Catholic-Jewish relations and deeply embedded in this work, for the people who feel like we shouldn't be talking about this because we've come so far, this would be damaging to look back, what is your response to that?

**Pawlikowski:**

I think we have to be completely open, in terms of the discussion about the historic relationship between Jews and Christians over the centuries. The late Father Edward Flannery, who kind of opened the discussion with his book, *The Anguish of the Jews*, around the time of the second Vatican council, always remarked that the pages of history that Jews knew the best in terms of the relationship with Christians and Christian states, is the history that is least known among many many Catholics. We have to admit in Catholicism, the dark side of the history of the church. I would say the dark side of religion as such, religion contrary to what some people would proclaim, has not always been on the side of justice, goodness, et cetera. It has a checkered history and that also holds true for the Catholic church as well as Protestant churches. And it seems to me that Nazi era represents one of the most challenging periods of testing the true meaning of the church in terms of its relationship to Jews, but to other groups in the world as well and the failures therein. Let me just make a couple comments on what Dr. Kertzer just said, to slight correction actually. "We Remember", the 1998 document on the Shoah, was largely

written by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, headed at the time by Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy of Australia who just died only a few weeks ago. And it did take into account a commission to work that Dr. Kertzer referred to, that commission basically examined the twelve or so volumes of archival material that were released under Pope Paul VI but the commission itself did not write what we remember but he is absolutely correct and it's very problematical that document had certain benefits, it put Holocaust education for example on the Catholic table but it also distorted significantly and there was no one quite more aware of that than the late Cardinal Cassidy, who was a very close friend of mine. Cardinal Cassidy was forced to accept as a condition of releasing the document, forced to accept distortions in the history of the time imposed on him by the Congregation for Sacred Doctrine in the Vatican which has to rule on every single document that comes from the Vatican, and they put it quite bluntly to him, either you accept the changes that we are proposing or the document will not be approved for formal release, and he made a very very hard choice to go ahead and release the document while he was quite well aware of its significant limitations, and one of the limitations, maybe the most serious limitation was the claim that it was only wayward Christians who had supported the Nazis. That is simply nonsense as I think Dr. Kertzer has rightly said. The people who supported from the Catholic church, who supported the Nazi movement or at least were indifferent to its violent attack on the Jews and other victims, did so because of a long long tradition of anti-Judaism that really merged into anti-Semitism throughout Christian history. And the attitude of the influential person who advised Pius the XII and some of the decisions, his outlook only represents the kind of prevailing outlook that was present in so much of Catholicism before the Vatican too, the other distortion, historically which Cardinal Cassidy had to accept was the claim that most Christians, Catholic Christians, tried to save Jews and only among a minority collaborated, that simply is a total factual inaccuracy. So, I think it's very very critical that we put the historical record straight, and we really deal with its implications as it actually occurred, not as a fictitious history in order to sort out certain questions we face presently in the church about responding to moral crises.

**Kertzer:**

The German Bishops recently came out with a statement accepting responsibility and expressing regret for their support of the war, of the Nazi war effort, and the French Bishops came out with a statement expressing regret for their role in supporting the Pétain Regime that was involved in exporting the Jews to their death in Nazi death camps. One thing I think we need to recognize when new see it, of course it is really embodied in Father Pawlikowski, often you target the church or the Vatican in fact it's a very heterogeneous organization with over a billion people and so the one thing I think is important and in our discussion it's not a matter of the Jews versus the Catholics, this is something that has divided Catholic opinion, including at the highest levels as we're seeing. The question of how some folks think it is better we don't talk about this because somehow it is going to make for more controversy, I'm reminded that when my book came out on the role of the Vatican and the rise of anti-Semitism, which is called *The Popes Against the Jews* maybe too provocatively, we were going to have the big event launching the book in New York which was going to take place at the Hillel Center of NYU with a very prominent cast of characters from all religious traditions and so forth. And a week before the event I got a call from the publisher telling me that it was cancelled, it was in this case, the Hillel director and rabbi decided no they were getting too many calls of people upset about us bringing up this topic and they really didn't want to do it so we had to move the event a block or two to a

center at NYU and this by the way has to do with often you hear the argument about Israel that is look we need the support of the Catholic church for Israel, that should be our priority, this is all ancient history let's not bring that up and let's be grateful to the church for being supportive today of what our organizational Jewish priorities are. So unfortunately, this kind of repression of the history rather than trying to understand it is, we find, not just Catholics but Jews.

**Pawlikowski:**

Let me just add one point, that I think we have to pursue this history not only up to the end of Nazism but I think we also have to look at Pius the XII's record in the immediately post-Nazi Europe because he no longer had to fear the supposed problems that some would say kept him from responding such as the bombing of Italy and the Vatican and so on. That was no longer a reality, a real possibility, and he could've made some decisions to really try to bring particularly German Catholics into a conversation about their failure in responsibility and he did almost the contrary. David, you may know at least the name of Gordon Zahn. Gordon Zahn wrote the first book on German Catholics and Hitler's wars, he happened to have been a professor of mine at the undergraduate level at Loyola University here in Chicago. And he worked very closely with a historian named Edward Gargan who eventually went on to the University of Wisconsin Madison. And Gargan was passionate as a Catholic and historian about the failure of Pius the XII and the Vatican. But the Vatican actually tried to get Professor Zahn fired from Loyola University for raising the question of Pius XII and the failure of the German churches. So even after World War 2 there was not only silence about the possibility of collaboration or at least avoidance of any protest, there was even a concrete effort to undercut people in the Catholic church who were trying, like Professor Zahn, who were trying to begin that conversations about Catholic responsibility.

**Picker Neiss:**

So let me ... we are getting a lot of questions coming in which is very exciting and I want to try to get to all of them, but before I get to some of the audience questions, I want to really you know, Dr. Kertzer you were one of the few people who was actually able to go to the archives before things were shut down and I would love if you could, I know we've touched on the history in many ways, both of you have expertise in this area, but I'm curious if you could share some of what you might've expected to find and then some of what you actually found when you accessed the archives.

**Kertzer:**

As the archives opened, the timing wasn't good, as I referred to, it opened March 2, a year ago 2020 and I was there.

**Picker Neiss:**

And Italy was not the greatest place to be at the start of Covid.

**Kertzer:**

No, so the pandemic had already begun but things hadn't shut down, and they did open March 2 so I was there from 4:30 when they opened the door to what used to be called the Vatican Secret archives and is now called the Vatican Apostolic archives and spent that week there for 45 hours,

I guess that they allowed me there and then the Secretary of State archive which was just across the courtyard. As Father Pawlikowski mentioned there are a number of different archives that are important, also the Inquisition archive where I work. And unfortunately, then that Friday they announced that they were closing it down until further notice, there was a lockdown in Italy and I realized I had to leave the country. Fortunately, they reopened in early June and although occasionally had to pause briefly it's largely been open under somewhat reduced hours since then. Fortunately, I have a collaborator who is Roman, who is Italian, a historian and he's been there working in these archives essentially every day and we've been working together on publications and material. So, I have found some pages of archival documents digitized on my computer that I'm working with. As Father Pawlikowski mentioned there are tens of millions of documents in these archives and such as the Vatican archives there are a number of Jesuit archives that just opened up, are about a block away from the Vatican opened up just this January, which is even more recently and there are thousands of interesting documents there as well for various reasons. On one hand there is a huge amount to work through and it will take many years to have fully extracted the important information from them, on the other hand they are well organized and over the last ten years in preparing them for the opening they've created a lot of finding aids which describe the documents in a fair amount of detail. So that, for example if you're like me and interested in Pope Pius XII 's relationship with Mussolini during the war, you can go to the archives of the Papal Nuncio in Italy and to a certain other archive which has these finding aids which allow you to relatively efficiently look at material. That said they also limit how many folders of material you can see each day, at the main archive just five. And they make copying it very expensive its ten dollars a page for every page from which folder you want to copy material. So, there's an incredible richness there and we're are finding very interesting things, not least the fact that Father Pawlikowski mentioned that in response to pressures about the silence of the Pope during the Holocaust, the Vatican had christened a series for Jesuit scholars to put together what turned out to be twelve large volumes, each one having hundreds of documents in it dealing with this history. And one thing I have discovered is that although they publish much more important material, they systematically left out certain materials that were compromising basically to the Vatican narrative, I'm working on a book right now on this that will hopefully be out next year.

**Picker Neiss:**

Sorry to interrupt, can you say explicitly what is the Vatican narrative and then what is compromised.

**Kertzer:**

Well, the Vatican narrative is that first of all there was no antisemitism motivating anyone in the Vatican or people around the Pope, they were all doing absolutely everything they possibly could to save the maximum number of Jewish lives possible and that if they didn't speak out more forcefully or forcefully at all it was only because of fear that it would cost more Jewish lives if they spoke out. And that's a narrative and I've discovered too that the Pope engaged in secret negotiations with Hitler beginning within two or three months into becoming Pope that's never been known, all word of that has been excluded from the twelve volumes. There's much I think we are learning despite the fact there are those who said given the publication of those hundreds of documents we already largely knew what had happened and there was nothing much to be learned but really there is a lot to be learned.

**Picker Neiss:**

So, I'm trying to weed through some of the questions we have so many coming in but some of the people are asking about the encyclical that was drafted by Pope Pius XI which was such a climactic moment in the film *Holy Silence*, people are asking me is there any copy of it or any way to see what it actually says?

**Pawlikowski:**

The texts are available, there have been any number of books written on it. It was composed by two Jesuits working independently, one was the American Jesuit who was very much involved in the early struggle against racism in this country, Father John Lafarge, the other person was a noted European Catholic scholar of the kind of social tradition of Catholicism, the cards condemning antisemitism and racism would have been I think a very significant contribution. There are those who would say however, that the other part of it, which really still described the Catholic Jewish relationship in traditional anti-Judaic terms that that would've been somewhat of a disaster if it had received at probation from anyone in the Vatican and may well have blocked the ability to totally restate the Catholic Jewish relationship by Vatican too in the document *Nostra Aetate*, chapter four. There's mixed feeling about whether or not the proclamations that were in that so-called secret document would have helped or hurt the situation overall. Certainly, there's no question if they had released and with approval Father Lafarge's section, I think it would have helped somewhat, how much to judge. But it would've helped somewhat I think, but the second part of it might well have been long term negative.

**Kertzer:**

I think one important thing to point out there, supplementing what Father Pawlikowski was saying, is that the Pope Pius XI called, this was a shock to American Jesuit John Lafarge who happened to be in Rome on a summons from the Pope, that he wanted to talk to him so of course he was surprised couldn't imagine what it could be and was even more surprised when the Pope asked him to write an encyclical denouncing racism and antisemitism. Normally encyclicals are written by experts around the Vatican and not some American who happened to be in Rome. And the reason was, I think, in my book on Mussolini I talk about this, the Pope didn't really trust the usual cast of characters who wrote the encyclicals around the Vatican and went way out of normal channels to call on this Jesuit. But John Lafarge felt from the Jesuit discipline that he needed to inform his superior of the order, worldwide superior who was a Polish man names Ledóchowski who had long been head of the Jesuit order and was vicious Anti-Semite and Ledóchowski was basically outraged that the Pope had this idea of an encyclical denouncing antisemitism and basically forced on Lafarge this German Theologian, who Father Pawlikowski mentioned, Gundlach who had written all sorts of, you might say, traditional Christian, anti-Jewish kinds of writings in the past so that may well explain the hodge-podge that resulted that Father Pawlikowski described well.

**Picker Neiss:**

So, we have some follow up questions, and you've already raised the question of its an impossibility to know an alternative history, right? So, if the Pope had spoken out more forcefully would the Nazis have attacked the Vatican? Would that have alarmed the Catholic community? There's no way to know that because that's obviously not what happened. But there

are questions in terms of once the Nazis lost the war why didn't the Pope do more in terms of the follow up? And particularly some of the questions about reuniting Jewish children with their parents, especially those Jewish children who were hiding in Christian homes or in monasteries in Catholic institutions. And I will just say, I mean obviously that's a story that predates the Nazi regime, I first kind of got to know you Dr. Kertzer, through *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* which I read in college and that story, so this isn't a story that's exclusive to World War 2, but I know from your article in the Atlantic that was part of what you discovered in the archives were efforts to hinder reuniting children with their parents and I wonder if you could speak more about that.

**Kertzer:**

Yes, and then maybe later we can turn to the question of whether it would have made a difference for the Pope to speak out or what he could've said that could've made any difference but in terms of the post war period, this issue of the Holocaust surviving children, my Atlantic piece focused on probably the best-known case which was focused on two Jewish brothers, the Finaly brothers in France. But in some ways, they were typical because their parents were arrested and sent to their death in concentration camps in Germany and left behind two little children who one of them was three years old, and they ended up being cared for by a Catholic woman and Catholic institutions and then at the end of the war the siblings of the parents who had survived, came to bring them back. So it wasn't just Jews in general it was actually their aunts and uncles who wanted to bring them back to their families and the group of people who were keeping them, including a number of nuns or religious women, nuns, and monks, ended up hiding them because the courts, the French courts were ruling that they needed to be returned to their family and so we don't know how many cases of this existed, there were many children who were became orphaned, Jewish children that became orphaned because of the Holocaust in places like Poland of course which has the largest, had 3 million Jews before the war and other parts of Europe and there were likely thousands who survived the war while their parents went off to their deaths and survived the war protected by Catholic families, we're not just talking about the Catholic part of this or Catholic institutions. Now many of them were baptized and we just don't know how many never made their way back to their parents, one thing we have discovered is in the archives, and that was the subject of my Atlantic article that you mentioned earlier last August, was that the Pope and the Vatican Inquisition office or the Holy Office was asked to weigh in by the prevalence involved in this in France and their advice was hold out as long as possible, if it becomes the impossible as quite a few monks and nuns were arrested you might have to give in, do so, but you might avoid that because, and here we get back to the logical issue that involves the Mortara case back in the nineteenth century the notion that children who had been baptized now should be regarded as Catholic, and it would be a sin for them to be returned to a Jewish family because then they would go through apostasy.

**Pawlikowski:**

Let me just add a word about the question of why Pius the XII didn't do or say more after the war had ended. And I'm not defending him at all on his but if you want to understand it fully, I think you have to understand the politics of immediate post war Germany. The Catholic community had found itself to be second class in Germany and was looking for ways to kind of restore its equality with the Protestant church. And some regrettably both during the Nazi regime but especially in that immediate postwar era when you had the first Catholic chancellor of Germany

they did not want to write or do anything that they felt would undermine the integrity of the Catholics who had come into power in Germany in terms of political leadership and that's to say while I don't defend them, I think if you want to understand it you do have to understand the situation somewhat in the context of immediate postwar politics in Germany and the fact too that, I'm sure David you know this quite well, there was a tradition of Catholic history and Protestant history and the twain never met. They each had their versions of the religious history of Germany over the centuries and strangely this did not even disappear after the, at least not immediately, after the end of the Hitler regime. So, there's a lot of complexity within the German political and historical scene that did affect how the period of the Holocaust was described by historians in the immediate years following World War 2.

**Picker Neiss:**

So there's two different ways that I can follow up on that and I'm trying to keep it all together because there's so much here and let me start by first of all asking we are getting a number of questions Father Pawlikowski, we are framing this in terms of lessons learned so the question of looking back at this history and recognizing, I shouldn't assume whether or not there is a recognition of some of the mistakes, whether or not there are lessons learned from that has that changed the way that the Catholic church has responded in other moral crises and some of the questions that have come up specifically relate to the rise of white supremacy in the United States of the persecution of LGBTQ individuals in Poland but I'm sure there's lots of other examples throughout the world, is the Catholic church responding differently in these situations?

**Pawlikowski:**

Well, I mean in some cases yes, there have been leading bishops and cardinals who supported efforts at social justice in many parts of the world and spoke out against the oppression and devaluation of people in terms of human rights. Human rights really does not become a solid central concept in Catholic social teaching until after the Nazi era. I did mention the example, might be a small isolated example, but the example of the bishops from Malawi when they faced the attacks from the president Hastings Banda and so on while they never made reference, that I know of, to the experience of the Holocaust it does represent a counter-witness and there were people who did stand up, even some bishops who did stand up against Nazism but they were hardly the majority, most were either supportive or at least silent and so on. I think that, I don't think at this point yet even in the current view of Catholic social ethics the Holocaust is seeing the Holocaust era is seen as absolutely critical period for examination of Catholic responsibility. Usually if we do a history of Catholic social teaching, we jump from the two encyclicals, social encyclicals that were issued prior to Vatican to the period of the second Vatican council and even a good friend of mine and an outstanding Catholic ethicist father Charles Curran, if you look at his writings on Catholic social teaching, he gives a few footnotes to the Nazi era but that is it, there is no solid examination of that period in terms of what we can learn on Catholic social teachings. I think contemporary Catholicism at various levels has been at best moderately adequate on the issue of racism, the most recent statement from the American bishops is seen as rather disappointing to put it mildly. Especially by many in the African American Catholic church, I would have to say that the general position of the Catholic leadership including the Vatican on LGBTQ issues is dismal from my point of view and even Pope Francis who on some occasions has given more positive signals in terms of acceptance has also at other times repeated the classical attack on LGBTQ people that has been central to Catholicism, not only Catholicism,

but speaking as Catholic. I don't think, I mean we need to remember that gay people, mostly gay men, not very many lesbians but mostly gay men and mostly German gay men some from a few other parts such as Poland, were attacked as part of the Nazi ideology of basic human degradation although the gay victims of the Nazis were seen as people who had the possibility of rehabilitation whereas Jews had no possibility of rehabilitation even being baptized was not something that could save them for most the Nazis needed they were still inherently a negative force on humanity.

**Picker Neiss:**

We are getting a number of questions about Nazis who escaped Germany during the war and whether there is any evidence or implication that the Vatican helped with that in any way?

**Kertzer:**

Yes, well so there is actually a pretty good book called *Nazis on the Run* by a scholar who has looked into this issue. It's a complicated history there was the Austrian bishop who's in charge of the kind of the German church in Rome name is Hudal, I think quite clearly helped a number of Nazi war criminals escape Europe and the others were involved in the so-called "red line", as well. One of the complications is they're not the only ones the Catholic Church or Vatican was not the only institution involved in helping Nazi war criminals escape it seems that the American CIA and others were in, presumably in the context of the war on communism being more important than fighting against the Nazis. And it still remains, I haven't seen any documents that I've come across in the open archives that give any direct responsibility of the Pope which sometimes comes up. So that said, one thing I do see is that for the Vatican there were good Nazis and the bad Nazis just like there were good Italian fascists and bad fascists and the difference from the Vatican point of view, if I can generalize a bit, the good fascists and the Nazis wanted to support the institutional church and the bad Nazis and bad fascists were anticlerics and antichurch and trying to reduce the influence of the church. So, you had for example, Ernst von Weizsäcker, who had been the number two secretary at the foreign ministry for several years of the war the Nazi foreign ministry became the ambassadors to the Vatican in the summer of 1943 and following the war, was one of the people of Neurenberg on trial for crimes against humanity and the Vatican did everything they could to argue he wasn't one of the bad Nazis he was a good Nazi. So, this is another kind of distinction that is behind the question of what the Vatican and the church did in individual cases.

**Pawlikowski:**

I would just add to that, there is some indication that something called the Croation College in Rome. There are many countries that have a strong Catholic identity established places essentially for education of priests in Rome and the Croation College was one such entity. And I think there's no question that they had some role in aiding and abetting the so-called "red line". However, there have been some people who have written on this who have said "well, it was a Pontifical college so therefore the Pope probably knew about what was going on there". There are hundreds if not thousands of institutions that have the title Pontifical added to their name, many of them are in Rome, I can assure you that the Pope has no idea what goes on day to day in those places. Now there was a few years ago, and I don't know if David you've ever seen these documents, some documents discovered in the Argentine council in Rome which seem to establish a greater level of knowledge among key Vatican officials regarding this "red line". But

that's also an indication that perhaps some of the more important documents on this may not in fact be in the Vatican archives, they may be in state archives somewhere. For example, one of the, the late John Morely, who I'm sure you know David, and his book on Vatican diplomacy always argued that what Saint Pius the XII could've done was to really instruct his Papal nuncios to make saving Jews priority. Several of them did, including the future John XXIII but it would be very interesting to know more about any interchanges on that question between these nuncios and the Vatican. I realize communication was not easy but it wasn't totally absent and I suspect there was some give and take maybe in terms of letters and papers from the nuncios to the Vatican regarding this issue of trying to save Jews through false baptismal certificates and so on.

**Kertzer:**

One point there, probably the most important from my point of view, is the Papal nuncio to Germany Cesare Orsenigo. He was constantly trying to make Hitler look better than he was. And he was really one of the saddest cases in this whole mystery. He had been appointed strangely by Pius XI despite the fact he didn't have much in the way of knowledge of the greater world. And Berlin became kind of enamored by his proximity to Hitler and so forth and so I have been reading hundreds of his reports to the Vatican which the Pope had to read and they're remarkable given what was going on. Still trying to argue on one hand, he couldn't really have any influence over the matters because Hitler said it was none of the Vatican's business and it was domestic affairs and secondly, things got exaggerated and actually yes there were a lot of Nazis but a lot of them were basically good Christians and the Pope shouldn't worry too much about the neopagan aspects of the Nazi regime.

**Pawlikowski:**

You know, I'll just mention in terms of the post Holocaust situation and Pius XII one of the strongest critics of Pius XII was the noted Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain who resigned as the French ambassador to the Vatican in protest over Pius XII's refusal to really challenge German Catholics in the years right after World War 2.

**Picker Neiss:**

So, this is going to take us into a slightly different direction but I have to confess my own curiosity in this, in the film, the film created a lot of drama around this moment just before Pope Pius XI was convening the convocation of the bishops and cardinals and this encyclical and then of course died right before. People want to know if there are conspiracy theories around that, is there an investigation? Is there any talk? And did the film overdramatize that?

**Kertzer:**

You know when I began working on my book on Pope Pius XI and Mussolini, The Pope and Mussolini, I was talking to someone in Italy and mentioned I was going to be writing on this book on Pope Pius XI and she said oh the one who was killed by Mussolini. So, the Italians actually are quite, find conspiracy theories convincing in many cases

**Picker Neiss:**

But Mussolini wouldn't have killed him because he was going to speak out about antisemitism, that would have been a different reason.

**Kertzer:**

No well that was part of it so there are two different things the encyclical was one thing but actually what you're referring to is, there was going to be this huge occasion on the tenth anniversary of the Lateran Pacts which is what established Vatican City which is what ended separation of church and state in Italy and made Catholicism the official state religion and gave it various benefits, this was all negotiated between Mussolini and the Vatican secretary of state at the time. So, this was maybe the tenth anniversary and Mussolini had long been hailing this big accomplishment bringing peace with the church. And I know from reading the reports of Mussolini's ambassador to the Holy City as well as from his spies in the Vatican, he had quite a few spies in the Vatican, you can read their reports. They were all telling him that on the occasion where all 350 or so bishops in Italy were going to be there along with the world press, the Pope was going to denounce Mussolini for embracing Hitler and his antisemitism and racism. So, Mussolini, as we know, is very worried about this and the fact that the Pope dies one day before he's supposed to give his speech led to a conspiracy theory which was furthered by the fact that the Pope's own doctor at the time was sick in bed that week and the number two man, if we can call him that, in the Vatican physician service was the father of Mussolini's lover, Clara Petacci, Dr. Petacci. And so you can easily see the scenario, however I probably would have sold a lot more copies of my book if I found evidence this actually took place but I didn't.

**Picker Neiss:**

So, Father John, this is not a conversation within the church at all?

**Pawlikowski:**

Which?

**Picker Neiss:**

Any conspiracy theories around the death of Pius XI.

**Pawlikowski:**

Well, it's certainly not, I haven't heard any outside of Italy. I think Professor Kertzer is correct, that within Italy there probably are some and within the Italian church. I don't think that, I mean I would have to go back I'm not a scholar on Pius XI, you'd have to go back and look at some of the major Catholic publication such as America and Commonweal and others and what they may have said about the death of Pius XI and whether they associated any sinister forces in terms of bringing about his death at this very crucial time. But that's not in my wheelhouse in terms of -

**Picker Neiss:**

Fair enough. So, you know, before, we are kind of coming to an end, one of the questions that's come up a couple times I will pose it but I don't know if this also goes out of both of your wheelhouse, but you referenced earlier Father Pawlikowski I think you specifically said it, that Protestant history has its own history but a couple of people have asked about the role of the Protestant church specifically the Lutheran church and if they were complicit and was Dietrich Bonhoeffer an exception to the rule or a model of that.

**Pawlikowski:**

Well, I think as Professor Kertzer's already indicated the Protestant church was very split on the question of Hitler, there was an element of the church which strongly supported and identified the so-called German Christian movement, the Deutsche Christen movement, which really embraced Hitler as kind of God's best man for Germany at the time. There was also, and you didn't have a whole lot of that kind of public embrace especially organized public embrace within the Catholic church at the time. There were some who did embrace Nazism, my colleague Professor Father Kevin Spicer of Stonehill College and formerly of Notre Dame has written extensively on the so called "brown priests" who did collaborate in one way or another directly with the Nazi leadership, now the Nazis didn't particularly relish Christian involvement, you know. One of the expressions of frustration on the part of some of the brown priests was that they couldn't move up the hierarchy in the Nazi system. Their support was accepted but it did not lead to, no matter what they did, did not lead to any kind of promotion within the Nazi bureaucracy, so yes, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an exception even though certainly early on in his theological career, he did express some very classical ideas about the Jewish Christian relationship which certainly were not positively, were not positive in terms of the outlook on Jews and Judaism but he clearly became a staunch opponent of Hitler, got jailed, died a short time, died in a Nazi prison a short time prior to the end of the war and so I know something of that because I was a collaborator to an extent with one of his relatives Eberhard Bethge, Professor Everhart Bekhti, who was part of the family and knew some of the things that happened in that inner circle. So yeah, Bonhoeffer clearly, and he decided, you may remember Bonhoeffer came to the United States to study as the Nazi era was beginning, and then he had to face the challenge does he go back? And he decided to go back and try to establish a kind of new version, not totally, I think what he would better say is a purified version of Christianity. He had a kind of underground seminary going and so and he really tried to develop a church that would be free of the kind of political machinations that he saw in the Protestant church. Another person who did stand up to an extent was the famous Protestant theologian Karl Barth, but he was rather in a safe place outside of Germany, and he had some influence definitely on the Barthian Christian movement and they did issue a proclamation condemning Nazism, there was also a proclamation that in words was not all that different by the German bishop's conference in Fulda, that met in Fulda. And however, once the concordat was signed, the formal agreement between the Vatican or the Holy See and the Nazi regime that Fulda document went into the deep freeze and was not really referenced ruling the rest of Nazi Europe.

**Picker Neiss:**

Let me just say I'm mindful of the time I know we have already gone a couple moments over, I'm actually going to invite each of you to say a couple of words but before that I'm going to do a profound thank you to both of you for your wisdom and expertise, this openness and vulnerability and grappling with this incredibly painful time in history and really modelling a way that we can do that in dialogue with each other. I want to thank our partners in this, hosted by the Danforth Center for Religion and Politics at Washington University, the Bernadin Center at Catholic Theological Union, and the Newmark Institute for Human Relations at the Jewish Community Relations Council. And you know I'm going to let both of you get the final word because this is what both of you have committed your time to, I mean with all of this, any final

reflections or anything you want to say in terms of closing us out. Again, with the recognition that we have already gone over.

**Pawlikowski:**

I would just say something similar to what Archbishop Gallagher, currently in the Vatican the number two man and the secretary of state said, when the Vatican archives were opened, he said, “let's keep an open mind and see what comes out of this study by all means we should study it and once we have a clear idea of what the picture was, we need to be able to model a response” and that is certainly my approach to this current situation.

**Kertzer:**

And I would extend my thanks to you for organizing this and Father Pawlikowski, it's been I think as we've heard and seen these are just very important issues with all sorts of implications today like the use of religion to demonize minorities whatever that religion may be. Aside from the specific issue of understanding the attempts to exterminate Europe's Jews. And those of us who have been working in this area are often subject to various kinds of vilification and go online to see all kinds of attacks so it is refreshing to have these occasions to have these, kind of, serious discussions and given the fact that we've just gotten such a huge amount of material to look through for the next two, three years these discussions will only be further enriched.

**Picker Neiss:**

Thank you again, thank you to everyone who joined us and I should say that when I first reached out to you, Professor Kertzer about coming here, you agreed to do this talk on condition that we get you to actually come to St. Louis when we're able to travel again, when your next book comes out, so we can look forward to that and Father Pawlikowski bringing you from Chicago I hope as well, at a time it would be wonderful we can all be in a room together. But for now, I'm grateful to have this virtual space, I know we have people joining us from all across the country not just from where I am in St. Louis not to mention you both are all over and so thank you all for taking some time out of your night and thank you for participating. Good night, everyone

**Pawlikowski:**

Goodnight.

**Kertzer:**

Goodbye.

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