

## **The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler**

David Kertzer, Brown University

Other speakers: Professor Marie Griffith, Washington University in St. Louis; Dr. Francis Levine, Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum; Monsignor Michael Witt, Archdiocese of St. Louis; Elizabeth Hersch, Jewish Community Relations Council  
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### **Levine:**

Good evening, good evening. Would you take a moment to silence your cellphones please? They must be silent because it's gotten very silent. Thank you so much. Good evening. My name is Dr. Francis Levine and I currently serve as the interim director for the Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum in St. Louis. It's my honor to welcome you here tonight on behalf of the museum and the many collaborators who have made this evening possible. Tonight's program is the product of an incredible collaboration between several organizations. Thank you first and foremost to the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University. Also, to the Michael and Barbara Newmark Institute for Human Relations at the Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis. The St. Louis Jewish Book Festival, the Office of Peace and Justice of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, St. Louis County Library, and the St. Louis University Division of Mission and Identity. Also a big thank you to Left Bank Books for handling book sales tonight, and for always making sure books are available and accessible for all. Our organizations all joined together to support tonight's event because we all agree on the historic significance and contemporary relevance of David Kertzer's newest book, *The Pope at War*. It's based upon the latest research from the Vatican's newly opened archives. What Dr. Kertzer learned and will share tonight sheds light on the largely untold and often debated role that the Vatican and Pope Pius XII played in response to the Holocaust. Like Dr. Kertzer, the St. Louis Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum aims to educate the public with the latest research in the field of Holocaust studies. We empower all our visitors to engage with the history of the Holocaust and through the stories and voices of those who experienced it firsthand, we consider the ways to apply the powerful lessons in our daily lives. At the museum, we remind people that change begins with each one of us. We truly believe that diving into the challenging history of the Holocaust, the topic of tonight's lecture, encourages each one of us to reconsider new ways to reject hatred, to promote understanding, and lead change in our communities. It's my honor to introduce Monsignor Michael Witt, Professor of Church History at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary and the historian of the Peace and Justice Commission of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Please welcome Monsignor Witt, please.

### **Msgn. Witt:**

I think we can all agree that one of the most enigmatic and multi-faceted personalities of the twenty-first century was Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII. This fact jumped out at me as I read with great interest Professor Kertzer's book, *The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler*. He mentions in March of 1940 that Myron Taylor, Roosevelt's envoy to the Vatican noted, and I quote, "Pius XII had an excellent source on Europe's unfolding drama. Indeed, it was the Pope who explained to them the course the war was about to take." This

foreknowledge might have come as a surprise to Taylor, but it was not to me. A few years ago, I read the Vatican's World War II role in encouraging German resistance groups in Nazi Germany. Mark Riebling's *Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War Against Hitler* is thoroughly researched, drew upon archival documents, and included personal interviews. It offered another insight into this Pope of silence. Pius was not unfamiliar with the likes of Admiral Canaris, the head of the Abwehrdienst, the Kreisau ring, Helmuth von Moltke, and Joey "the Ox" Müller. Indeed, Riebling shows that the Pope was intimately involved in their efforts to remove Hitler. As I looked at the shelves of my seminary office, Professor Kertzer showed me that I had a blind spot. I was reading the likes of Ronald Rychlak, Pierre Blet, Margherita Marchione, a good portion of Raul Hilberg, and the rather polemic writings of Ralph McNerny. *The Pope at War* showed me this blind spot. That Pius had remained silent even when he learned of the horrible happenings in Eastern Europe, that Pius placed institutional survival over moral outrage, as a Catholic, as a Catholic priest, and as a recovering ultramontanist, I found some of Professor Kertzer's chapters rather difficult on my heart. And yet this book was like a sharpening stone for my brain. It offered yet another dimension of this multi-dimensional man. Professor Kertzer's book is provocative and thought-provoking and if you have not read *The Pope at War* yet, I do not recommend that you read it. I recommend that you devour it. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

**Griffith:**

Good evening, everyone. My name is Marie Griffith and I am the Director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics here at Washington University in St. Louis and I want to join my colleagues in welcoming all of you here tonight, the hundreds of you who are right here in Graham Chapel and the many more of you who are watching via live stream. We are truly thrilled and honored to have all of you with us. It is a tremendous honor for the center to be co-hosting this event which such distinguished partners as you've already heard listed and I'm particularly grateful to Maharat Rory Picker Neiss for many years of collaboration, solidarity, and friendship and hoping for many more. Thanks to so many people who worked very hard to make tonight's event happen and I couldn't be more grateful to you all. For tonight's Q and A that will follow our conversation, you may write a question on a card that will make its way to me. So staff will be collecting cards twice, around 7:45 and around 8:10, so you can give yours to them then. And the Q and A, we won't have live Q and A but we will be able to include your questions at that time. It is now my honor to introduce tonight's eminent speaker and conversation partner. David Kertzer is the Paul Dupee University Professor of Social Science at Brown University, where he also served five years as Provost. He is one of the world's leading scholars of Italian history and the history of the Vatican, and an award-winning authority on Italian politics and society, among other areas. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has achieved too many other honors to name here. He is the author of more than a dozen books, indeed I believe the latest is his thirteenth. His previous books include *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism*, *The Pope Who Would be King: The Exile of Pius IX and the Emergence of Modern Europe*, *Amalia's Tale: A Poor Peasant, an Ambitious Attorney, and a Fight for Justice*, and *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 2015. The earlier book, excuse me, was Pius the Ninth and the Emergence of Modern Europe, excuse me. So this is our third

pope from Professor Kertzer. His latest book is the absolutely stunning book that we will be discussing this evening, *The Pope at War*. This book is a New York Times bestseller and one of the New Yorker's Best Books of the Year. It was published just a few months ago in 2022. Daniel Silba calls it "the most important book ever written about the Catholic Church and its conduct during World War II" while the Washington Post writes that it is "the most comprehensive account of the Vatican's relations to the Nazi and fascist regimes before and during the war." The book is based on thousands of never-before seen documents from the Vatican archives of Pope Pius XII, which were only unsealed to researchers in 2020. It also includes research from numerous archives in Italy, Germany, France, Britain, and the United States. The book clears away a lot of myths and sheer falsehoods surrounding the Pope's actions from 1939 to 1945, showing why the Pope repeatedly bent to the wills of Hitler and Mussolini. Professor Kertzer is now going to speak to us about the book for several minutes, after which he and I will sit in conversation, and then we will get to as many of your questions as we can. Please join me now in welcoming to the stage Professor David Kertzer.

**Kertzer:**

Thank you. I'd like to thank Professor Griffith for engaging in this conversation we're about to have, and to all the sponsors tonight. It's wonderful to be here and to see so many of you here to consider this matter that has been such a controversy for so many years and hopefully we can begin to shed some clarity on it. What I wanted to do is just—we're going to spend most of our time in more informal conversation—but just spend five or six minutes by way of introduction and show you a few images to just get us into the topic. So just a word on how I came to write this book and why. They're both kind of personal reasons and you might say professional reasons. When I think of personal reasons, I think of my father, because my father was a Rabbi and a chaplain in the US army in World War II. And this is an image from *Look Magazine* in 1944 when he was the Jewish chaplain at Anzio beachhead, and Anzio beachhead was where the allied troops landed in January 1944 about 30 miles south of Rome, as part of the effort to liberate Rome from the occupying German military. So, I grew up with...so this is my father in a wine cellar leading a Passover service in the spring of 1944 just before the troops finally broke free, they were under a German bombardment there, and he was with the troops as they liberated Rome in the beginning of June. So I grew up with stories about the war and about Italy and the war, and about Rome and especially the Roman Jews in the war, but there were more professional scholarly reasons as well, as Professor Griffith mentioned, there has been a major controversy over the conduct of the Vatican and especially Pope Pius XII during the war, there have been those who still today call for his being made a saint, who have described him as a great courageous figure, a great opponent of fascism and Naziism, a savior of perhaps hundreds of thousands or more Jews, but then there are others who tell a very different story, as famously put into words by John Cornwell in rather unfair language, I think: "Hitler's Pope." He certainly wasn't Hitler's Pope, but the controversy has raged on. In 1963, there was a play that perhaps some here remember called *The Deputy*, which really first started this public controversy about the silence of the Pope during the Holocaust. In reaction...I'm going to show you an image here, what do you see? Well, the play *The Deputy*, *Hitler's Pope*, in the middle, as a reaction to the controversy spawned by the play *The Deputy* in 1963, the then-Pope Paul VI commissioned a group of four Jesuit historians to go through the archives of the Vatican that were not open to

researchers and would not be open until March of 2020 and to select out papers and documents relevant to the actions of the Pope in the Vatican during World War II. They ended up, as you see, publishing twelve thick volumes of those documents. In fact, some would say as a result that all the hubbub about opening the Vatican archives for World War II was misplaced because all the relevant papers had already been made available in this way. As we'll see this is not the case. Since I had written a previous book not too long ago about the predecessor of Pius XII, Pius XI, who was the Pope from 1922 to early 1939 and, in fact, the man who would become Pius XII, Eugenio Pacelli, throughout the 1930s was the Cardinal who served as Secretary of State to Pius XI, so he was a major figure even in this earlier book. It was kind of a logical next step for me to think about continuing this story that I began in the book about Pius XI and Mussolini with this new chapter. So although there'd been pressure on the Vatican for many years, or decades really, to open the archives for these years, the war years, I made a kind of bet I guess when Francis became Pope that, as part of his much-announced efforts for greater transparency in the church, and given all those pressures, he would be the one to finally open those archives. So I began, even years before that opening, to work in the archives that were open, they too, Professor Griffith mentioned them, are crucial because working in the fascist, the Italian archives, the German archives, the British, French, and American archives, each of these countries had an ambassador, an envoy, to the Vatican throughout the war years who were reporting on virtually a day-by-day basis about their conversation either with the Pope or, more frequently of course, with the people around the Pope. So I had tens of thousands of pages of documents from those archives already digitized when, fortunately for me because I didn't know what I was going to do with this if they hadn't opened the Vatican archives because then if I wrote my book and then the Vatican archives opened, everybody would say you know, I didn't know what was actually happening, so fortunately for me, just as I was finishing the work in the other archives, they did. Pope Francis announced the opening, which would take place March second, 2020. Now, some of you may remember March 2020. You may even remember that Italy was the epicenter of a new virus that seemed to be going around. So, as it happened, I won't go into the gory details, I was there alone with some colleagues at the main Vatican archive on the morning of March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020, there next to me is, by the way, a quite prominent German church historian Hubert Wolf. One advantage senior professors in Germany seem to have is they get to have a whole phalanx of assistants with them, which is what you see there. My one collaborator was taking this picture so we don't get to see him. So my wife and I rented an apartment for several months, I was on leave, but then after one week working there, they closed the archives until further notice because of COVID. We had to, a few days later, basically flee the country because there was a lockdown of a sort the US never knew, I mean, you couldn't leave your apartment. So fortunately we got out kind of on the last plane out of town, out of Rome. But fortunately, they did reopen the archives three months later in June 2020 and while almost no one else could get there because of travel restrictions both internationally and even traveling within Italy, my collaborator, Roberto Benedetti, who's an Italian historian of the church and of Italian history, being Roman, was able to begin again to work there every day and we would be in daily contact. So in the end, thanks in good part to him, I was able to have about 8,000 pages of carefully selected newly available archival documents from the Vatican archives digitized, and a part of what my book is based on. So I would just say one more thing here, which is that it's not true as I

said that they actually made available in those twelve volumes all the important events going on behind the scenes in the Vatican during World War II and perhaps the most shocking finding that I had that got published in my book for the first time, amazingly, because it's amazing that the Vatican was able to keep the secret for over eighty years until my book appeared, but shortly after Eugenio Pacelli became Pope Pius XII, Hitler, seeing an opportunity to reach a better understanding because his predecessor Pius XI had become increasingly vocally anti-Third Reich and had filled the pages of the Vatican daily newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* with complaints about the poor treatment of the Catholic church in Germany by the regime, when Pius XII became Pope, among other things, he ordered the Vatican paper to stop all criticism of Germany. So I discovered that Hitler, seeing an opportunity, sent a secret envoy to the Pope and he met with him secretly over many months, and even more amazingly than discovering that these meetings took place, I discovered that the Pope kept a German, and these negotiations were held in German, the Pope had spent twelve years in Germany as papal nuncio and was fluent in German, the Pope kept a German prelate hidden in the next room during these conversations with Hitler's envoy and kept basically a transcript of their conversations in German, which we were able to discover. I just give that as one example. So there's a lot to be discovered. By the way, to mention one other thing, even in those archives that were open, there's constantly new materials being placed in them. For example, the Italian archives of the fascist government, but also in the American British archives, other archives, you have material declassified over time. So even books written earlier using those other archives didn't get to see all the material that I was able to get to see for this book. This is the, as you see, the man Prince von Hessen, the great grandson, among other things, of Queen Victoria of England, his brother married the sister of Prince Philip, who died a few years ago in England, and that's Mafalda, his wife, the daughter of the king of Italy. So this itself is kind of an intriguing story. But before we begin our conversation, I think we need to put some faces on this, and one of the crucial episodes in my book and in this history is October 16, 1943 when the S.S. were sent to round up all the Jews of Rome to send to their death at Auschwitz. When they arrived at Auschwitz, a week later, this is the man who met them, the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele who directed about two thirds or three quarters, most of the women, all the children, all the old people to one side. They were sent directly to the gas chamber that same day of their arrival. A number of able-bodied men and women were sent to work camps where all but 17 would die as well. And just a couple of the faces of these, just examples, of course, of what would be millions of Jews, the fate they met, but these are the ones who were carted off on that train two days after being rounded up on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1943, women and children. So with those few words, I look forward to our discussion, so thank you.

**Griffith:**

Thank you so much, Professor Kertzer, so much to talk about, and I just want to commend...I'm going to show you all my copy of this book, and you see all the many Post-its and sticky notes and notes I took throughout. I commend it. It's really the most significant book I've read in a number of years. As you point out, there has long been controversy over the silence of Pope Pius XII toward the persecution of the Jews, and you really do a remarkable job of addressing this by sticking very closely to the facts as documented in this enormous array of archival papers,

including, but not only, the newly opened Vatican archives. And the analysis of this Pope's silence is extraordinarily detailed and I think virtually indisputable. So I want to ask you a series of questions, really following your chronology, the chronology of the book, and really taking us through World War II. I'm going to go back to the very beginning of the story you tell because you start the book with the predecessor to Pius XII, that is, Pope Pius XI as you mentioned a minute ago, a very very different Pope indeed. In fact, Pius XI died only a day, one day, before he was to speak publicly to denounce Mussolini's embrace of Nazi Germany. In 1939, word leaked that the Pope was about to issue an encyclical denouncing racism but he never did so, so I want to start and ask you to tell us that story. Well as I mentioned, Pius XI, who had been Pope beginning in 1922 and was the Pope who made a deal with Mussolini that established Vatican City and ended separation of church and state in Italy, so he had been a supporter, along with the Vatican, of the Italian-fascist regime, but the Italian-fascist regime was seen as a pro-Catholic, pro-church regime for the most part. There were some concerns but it had strong church support. But the attitude towards Nazi Germany was entirely different. This is something people often don't understand—they talk about the two dictatorships, or totalitarianism. But from the Vatican's point of view at the time, the fascist regime was pro-church and in fact had reversed a lot of liberal Italy's sins from the point of view of the church, whereas Hitler and the Nazi movement was a Pagan movement and anti-church and in fact eroding the influence of the Catholic church in Germany. So despite the fact of having supported Mussolini's regime, as Mussolini increasingly embraces Hitler, beginning, say, in the mid-1930s, the pope, Pius XI, becomes increasingly alarmed and, as I mentioned, by the last months of his papacy, becomes increasingly hostile. Also beginning basically in the summer of 1938, Hitler has a triumphal visit with Mussolini in Rome and in Italy. In the spring of 1938, Pope Pius XI flees the Vatican, orders the lights to be turned off, the museum to be closed, and so on to show his displeasure. Then the antisemitic racial laws are announced by Mussolini shortly thereafter, so there are these series of events taking place, Pius XI is increasingly unhappy with Mussolini for these reasons and is supposed to, on February 11, 1939, which is going to be the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of those Lateran Accords that established Vatican City and the concordat with Italy, the Pope had invited all the 350 bishops of Italy to come to St. Peter's along with the world's press. I know from the fascist archives that Mussolini was informed by his ambassador to the Vatican that at that occasion, the Pope was planning to denounce his embrace of Nazi Germany, so Mussolini was very worried about this, concerned. Of course, Italy was 99 percent Catholic. The church was enormously influential there, and the Pope dies a day before giving that speech, leading to various conspiracy theories, of course. Now, the Pope had been quite ill. So, that's the context in which the transition...so, Secretary of State Cardinal Pacelli was the chamberlain, so in charge of the inter-regnum, or inter-papal period, until the new conclave, and the conclave of course elected the chamberlain, the former Cardinal Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli, to be the new Pope Pius XII.

### **Griffith:**

You alluded to this in the slideshow, but among the many finds that you discovered in the archive of the Vatican Secretariat of State, are documents pertaining directly to Hitler's secret communications with Pope Pius XII, which started even before Germany invaded Poland, and

this is just an astonishing story, so tell us a little bit more about what you learned and what's significant about those hidden communications.

**Kertzer:**

So Hitler, as I say, it was not that the Pope had any love for Hitler or Naziism, which he certainly didn't—quite the reverse—which is why I say “Hitler's Pope” I think is a totally misleading title. But, as I mentioned, the Pope did, among his first things, decide that all criticism of the Nazi regime should be erased from the Vatican newspaper. He sent a telegram of greeting to Hitler and so on. So, Hitler saw an opportunity with the new Pope to reach what would be, from Hitler's point of view, a better understanding. Didn't like to be criticized by the Pope. Hitler, despite being a pagan, I mean Hitler had been baptized Catholic but clearly was far from a practicing Catholic, about as far from one as Mussolini was. But Hitler saw an opportunity to establish a new rapport where he wouldn't get this kind of criticism because the Third Reich, after they took over Austria, was about forty percent Roman Catholic, so it was uncomfortable from Hitler's point of view to be constantly criticized by the Pope. For all these reasons, he saw this opportunity: he had this man in von Hessen who seemed to be perfectly placed because he was, in fact one of the German biographers of Hitler described him as one of Hitler's two closest friends, and so he had this very close relationship with von Hessen. He had made von Hessen head of the province where his aristocratic family was from in Prussia and in fact, von Hessen had been the advisor to Hitler on acquisition of artwork from Italy, but as I mentioned, as you saw, he was married to the daughter of the king of Italy. For all these reasons, he seemed perfectly placed for this role. The amazing thing to me was that the secrecy, so I talked about the secrecy until my book came out and the public hasn't known about this, but also the secrecy at the time that even Hitler's own ambassador to the Holy See, the ambassador to the Vatican, did not know these negotiations were taking place. And similarly, on the Pope's side, he kept this secret from virtually all the people and none of the Cardinals knew about this, well, probably none of the Cardinals knew about it. I think perhaps not even the Cardinal Secretary of State, so, you know, this is what was going on. The fact that we have the transcripts now allows us to understand what was said. So basically, from Hitler's point of view, he wanted to see that all the criticism of Nazi Germany stopped. So it's pretty clear what Hitler would want to get out of it. Why would the Pope have entered into these negotiations? He saw the churches being persecuted in Germany. The Jews didn't enter into this in any way in their discussions, other than von Hessen made an illusion that, you know, this would be a problem if the Pope was concerned about that, but the Pope basically ignored that and went on to complain about how the church was being treated in Germany, so you know, both sides saw some advantage. One could say that from Hitler's point of view, he saw this as a way to string along the Pope and kind of buy his silence.

**Griffith:**

And so when Germany invaded Poland, and that's September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, Pope Pius XII was horrified for the Catholics of that country, of course, but he also dreaded, you write, the almost unbearable pressure that would now be on him to condemn the Nazi invasion. Now, I just want to ask you to tell us about the choices that he faced, and how he grappled with his response to the invasion. What was the rationale at the time for how he reacted?

**Kertzer:**

I think what people don't realize often when they talk about the silence of the Pope in World War II, that it initially had nothing to do with Jews. It had to do with Catholics. It had to do with the Polish Catholics in particular. So we normally date the start of World War II to September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, the massive German invasion of Poland, and among other things, the Western part of Poland was going to be enveloped in the Third Reich itself and one of the methods used was to replace the Polish priests with German priests and to kind of Germanify these Polish areas. In fact, the Polish priests were seen as a main source of Polish nationalism and rallying the local Polish population against the Nazi invasion. Among the first things that the invading German troops did was to arrest hundreds of Roman Catholic Polish priests and send them to concentration camps where many died. It was not an exterminationist campaign as there would be against the Jews later, but many died and hundreds were sent to concentration camps so the Polish Catholics, including the government, soon government in exile of Poland, were begging the Pope to speak out condemning what was happening, and the Pope refused. So this was before the whole silence of the Pope during the Holocaust comes up and to some extent, I think, helps us understand the silence during the Holocaust as well. People say, you know, this is simply a matter of antisemitism and I think that's not the case, not that there wasn't antisemitism that we can talk about, but something else was going on that was probably more important here. The Pope, you know, realized that if he, or from his point of view, if he were to attack the invasion, that he would be, among other things, seen as attacking many German Catholics because who was doing the invasion? The invasion, actually, was quite popular in Germany at the time, and of course, more or less forty percent of the troops were Catholic, so the Pope was, along with some other considerations, worried about producing a fracture in the Roman Catholic Church in Germany if he were to denounce Hitler and the invasion of Poland.

**Griffith:**

Hitler's complaint, though, a lot of the times, was that priests were engaging in political activity, and that was part of what he was trying to get...

**Kertzer:**

Yeah, I mean, political activity. And this, in the secret negotiations, this is something von Hessen said, he said "Hitler just has two demands of you: one, so far you haven't been complaining about our treatment of Jews, and you know, that's fine, but also Hitler's concerned about the priests engaging in political activity. You've got to be sure they don't." The Pope said "well no, I'm not aware that the priests get involved in political activity," but what did Hitler mean by political activity? It would be criticizing what he was doing, that's engaging in German politics, and so this is what Hitler was trying to prevent.

**Griffith:**

And then as Italy inched closer to entering the war, so this is around May 1940, I think, a number of Italians, this is fascinating, a number of Italians plead with the Pope to excommunicate Mussolini as well as Hitler and I'd love for you to tell us more about that and also did Nazis or fascists actually fear that he would excommunicate them? How close do you think the Pope actually came to doing that?

**Kertzer:**



It wasn't just Italian sources, but for example, when France was being invaded, the members of the French government, as the German troops were pouring over the border into France, were sending word begging the Pope to excommunicate especially Hitler but also Mussolini. The Pope, although in 1949 he would excommunicate all Communists, never seriously considered excommunicating either Mussolini or Hitler as far as we can tell from the archives. So it just never happened.

**Griffith:**

And it was interesting, I think the British envoy to the Vatican, Francis D'Arcy Osborne, from the way you write about him, he seems to have been particularly astute about the long-term consequences of the Pope remaining silent, essentially abnegating moral leadership in this sense, right.

**Kertzer:**

Yes, the Pope came under unrelenting pressure, among other things, from various foreign envoys, the Polish ambassador to the Holy See, but also of course, the British and American envoys and a number of other envoys of other countries that were being invaded by the German military. So this was, not just like a brief affair. It was constant pressure that the Pope was obviously very conscious of. In fact, I think I talk about a visit that Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, who was then the Papal emissary in Istanbul, came for a visit, I think it was in 1941, to the Vatican, met with the Pope, and he said that the Pope had tears in his eyes as the Pope said to him "What do you think people are going to say about the fact that I'm under this pressure that I am taking this position of neutrality in the war?" So it's not something that the Pope was at all unaware of.

**Griffith:**

And just staying on that, so as far as has been documented I take it, the Pope first received credible reports about the Germans systematically murdering Jews around October of 1941. And at first he said nothing, indeed, you write about his own military chaplain, Father Scavizzi, begging him to speak out on the atrocities. Scavizzi himself had witnessed the dynamiting of synagogues and the massacres of Jews, being forced to dig a ditch and then being machine gunned and thrown inside of it. When the Pope did occasionally say something, though, to German and Italian authorities, and you make this point repeatedly in the book, his concern was chiefly not Jews but the application of the racial laws to those that the Church deemed Catholic: that is, those Jews who had been baptized by the Church, as well as the baptized children of mixed marriages. And over and over again, you document how those Catholic Jews with Vatican connections were saved from murder, even as little to nothing was done about all the other Jews, the Jewish Jews. So, talk to us about that. How does this fit into the longer Church's history, its attitude towards Jews.

**Kertzer:**

Yes, well, there are two things here: the reports he was getting about the mass murder of Europe's Jews by the Nazis and the priest you mentioned was a Roman priest who served as an Italian chaplain with the Italian military going back and forth on the hospital train from Italy to the Eastern front after the invasion of the Soviet Union and bringing back, and actually meeting with the Pope, bringing back these basically firsthand reports of the attempted extermination of

Europe's Jews that was going on. The question of saving baptized Jews, Jews who had been baptized, one thing that really struck me doing this research and something that hasn't been sufficiently studied by historians even today is that thousands and thousands of Jews were trying to escape persecution by getting baptized, and this began before the war itself began because in Europe, antisemitic laws that were very draconian were passed in many many countries. It wasn't just the Nuremburg laws in 1935 in Germany and the racial laws in Italy in 1938 but laws in Poland, in Hungary, in Austria and Romania and so on, all these were leading to a large number of Jews losing jobs, children being thrown out of the schools as they were in Italy, and so on. So, if I take the case of the Italian racial laws, which I know the most about, there's a lot of documentation available in these newly opened archives. Beginning in fall 1938, all Italian children were thrown out of the public schools, Italian men or adults were thrown out of their jobs, almost all decent jobs they lost, so they're being impoverished. And this was in the name of a division between two races in Italy: the Aryan race and the Jewish race. The Aryan race is another way of saying Catholic, so that if you, despite pseudo-scientific racial language, so if you could establish your credentials as a Catholic, you could hope to avoid losing your job for example, having your children thrown out of school and all the rest. Just to give an illustration, one of the provisions of the racial laws was that a child born of a so-called mixed marriage, a marriage one parent Jewish, one parent Catholic, would be considered Aryan if baptized before the beginning of the racial law, so before October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1938. If you were baptized on October 1<sup>st</sup> or October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1938, even though you had the same parents, you were considered of the Jewish race. So you could have, and did have, you know, one brother of the Aryan race, the other brother—same parents—of the Jewish race. SSSo the Vatican was under Pope Pius XII but even beginning, actually, under Pius XI, was busy trying to certify the baptismal status of large numbers of baptized Jews to have them escape persecution. So what they call the "Jews Files" which are 35,000 pages newly available in these Vatican archives, the Jews Files contain hundreds and hundreds of copies of baptismal certificates because this is a good part of how they were aiding—when they talk about "helping the Jews" during the Holocaust, during persecution, this is a major part of what was happening.

**Griffith:**

We'll come back to that, too. Okay, an important story you also tell occurred, and you mentioned this earlier, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1943, which happened to be the Sabbath and on that day, German officers carrying clipboards with lists of the Jews who lived in Rome rounded up all the Jews they could, women and men, babies and the elderly, those in the ghetto, those outside, sparing no one, and as this was happening, you quote an S.S. officer who claimed to quote Pius XII as saying "if you have to deport the Jews, it is well to do it quickly." Now, the Pope never said such a thing, you then say, but because he had never spoken out against Italy's own racial laws or against the Nazi's systematic murder of the Jews, this allowed these stories to be spread among the S.S. and the German troops and it allowed those murderous troops to believe themselves to be good and faithful Catholics, did it not? Could you say just more about that?

**Kertzer:**

Probably in the whole debate about the controversy about the silence of the Pope, there's no more crucial episode than the roundup of the Jews of Rome. Partly because, of course, it was literally under his window, but also because historically, Popes had regarded the Jews in Rome as under their kind of personal protection. In fact, the Jews in Rome had been referred to as the

Pope's Jews, which I think is the name I give the chapter on this in my book. So the order is given actually by Hitler himself to have the Jews rounded up in Rome. The S.S. goes house to house, dramatically beginning at basically dawn on Saturday morning, October 13<sup>th</sup>. They round up 1,259 Jews and they put them in trucks and send them across, well, of course, the Tiber River, at least those who are on the side of the old ghetto where many of them lived, to a holding facility with a military college right outside the walls of Vatican City and they were held there for two days. Now, they're held there for two days. The Pope is not at all happy about this, of course, for both humanitarian reasons and he knew what was going to happen to them, but also because, of course, it put him in an extremely awkward embarrassing position given all the pressure he'd already been under to denounce what was going on with the Nazi campaign of exterminating Europe's Jews. So he has his Secretary of State...He learns about this practically within an hour of its beginning early in the morning of that October 16<sup>th</sup> day. He calls on his Secretary of State to summon the German ambassador to the Holy See. His name is Ernst Weizsäcker, who came shortly after noon that day, and the Cardinal Secretary of State kept a...later writes down the conversation he has, and this is actually one of the documents that was published in those twelve volumes I mentioned before, was the Cardinal Secretary of State's account of his meeting that day with the German ambassador, and the Cardinal says to him this is terrible, the Pope is very upset. I call on you as a humane individual to...can you possibly do something to stop this? And Weizsäcker responds, he says this has been ordered by the very top, meaning by Hitler. He says do you really want me to send a protest from the Pope about what we're doing today? And at that, the Cardinal Secretary of State, and this is his own account, says "oh no, I didn't say that." In fact, they issue no protest and it continues. The other, I mean to tie this into the baptized Jews aspect, there's another element to the story, because those Jews, the 1,259 who were rounded up are held for two days and the train is already there to take them to Auschwitz but it doesn't leave for two days, and what happens those two days, they check the baptismal credentials of the 1,259 Jews that they had rounded up because they don't want to offend the Pope. And there are not 1,259 Jews put on the train two days later to Auschwitz. There were 1,007. So about 250 were released because either they could show they were baptized, or, and this is...I wasn't expecting when I found this, they were generally men, Jewish men, married to Catholic women in Catholic ceremonies—that is, they got dispensation because they had agreed to raise all their children as Catholics, have them baptized at birth and raised as Catholic. They were like go-to. The one thing we find in these newly opened archives are these various efforts to frantically prove the baptismal credentials of these Jews that had been rounded up.

**Griffith:**

And another chilling detail from that account is when relatives of the captured Jews sent the Pope a plea to intervene, he told a spokesman to, and this is a quote you found in the archives, "Let them know that one is doing everything that one can."

**Kertzer:**

Yes, this was often a response, and I mean, one other thing along these lines I find I mentioned, the 35,000 pages of the Jews File, requests from Jews for help. Many of these, over the course of the Holocaust, would come from German-occupied areas or involve them, for example, you would have a sibling or a parent or a child in Italy of a Polish Jew or Jewish family or German or Austrian, and they'd say you know, we're getting reports that our parents, for example, are about

to be sent off to Poland and they'll never be seen again if this happens, can you do something? And often what would happen is the Secretary of State would then send a letter or telegram to the papal nuncio in Berlin, Cesare Vincenzo Orsenigo, and actually send a copy, if they were sending through mail, send a copy of the letter and say use your prudence to see if there's anything you can do. The fact is, there is absolutely nothing he could do. There is no way that the nuncio in Berlin is going to stop the deportation of these Jews and the nuncio was the first person to know this and he would constantly write back and say, unfortunately, as you know, there's absolutely nothing I can do. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State would send a letter back or a message back to the family member in Rome, for example, saying "we want to let you know that we're doing everything possible to have your parents liberated." Which was technically true, but you know, this is what was going on.

**Griffith:**

And it was sometimes Catholic leaders themselves who were begging the Pope to do more.

**Kertzer:**

Yes, that's right. Of course, at the time, there were many Jews being hidden in convents and monasteries and so on and not to mention by Catholic individuals, but we're focusing here on the Pope and his action and the Vatican itself. It's not true by the way, sometimes you hear about hundreds of Jews being saved in Vatican City or in the papal summer palace at Castel Gandolfo. That isn't true there were just a handful who were, and they, for the most part, just snuck in.

**Griffith:**

Okay, moving to, let's see, 1944. So, the allied troops liberate Rome, including the Jews in Rome, but Jews in the north were still being herded onto trains, bound for the Nazi death camps. And you tell a chilling story: at the time, Palestine's two chief Rabbis, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, send an urgent message to the Vatican about their tormented brethren and beg to have an audience with the Pope, "well aware," you write, "of the kind of help the Rabbis would be asking him for, the Pope judged it best to turn down their request, albeit taking care not to put anything in writing. A note on the newly available Vatican file reads 'as for the audience requested by Chief Rabbi Herzog of Jerusalem, the decision of the Holy Father is this: he believes it well not to respond.'" Not to respond at all. So even then, the Germans could really count on the Pope's silence, even then. Could they not?

**Kertzer:**

Right, so Rome was liberated but as you mentioned, much of northern Italy is still occupied by German troops and of course, the war is going on. This is basically summer of 1944. And we see this with other evidence in the newly opened archives: the Pope doesn't want to be seen meeting with Jewish leaders or Rabbis, Jewish groups. He's afraid that the Nazis will be able to brand the Vatican as 'friends of the Jews' and that, he wants to avoid, so that episode is rather dramatic. He would meet with the Chief Rabbi after the war, when the Rabbi came to try to enlist the Pope's help in releasing the many Jewish children, the Holocaust orphans, who had been taken in by Catholic institutions, and the Rabbis were trying to recuperate them for the Jewish community, but that's kind of another story. That was when he would finally meet with the Rabbi.

**Griffith:**

Now, shortly after Germany surrendered, this is the spring of 1945 now we're up to, the Pope did give a speech in which he sought to set the terms or the narrative of his stance towards the axis powers, and you write about this speech in very strong terms. The bulk of the speech, you say, chronicled what he described as the Nazi regime's campaign against the Catholic Church. I just want to quote you here, this is a passage from page 460. "The Pope's speech highlighted the suffering of Catholics and the Catholic Church during the war, and represented the Catholics in Germany as the Nazis' victims. He made not even the briefest mention, indeed, no mention at all, of the Nazis' extermination of Europe's Jews. If any Jews had been in those concentration camps alongside the valorous Catholic priests and Italian and lay Catholics, one would not know it from the Pope's speech." And shortly thereafter, you write "the youth wind of Italian Catholic action organized celebrations to offer thanks to Pius XII, heralding him as the savior of Rome and the great defender of Christianity." So there's a lot to unpack there, if you would reflect on that. And I also want to ask you: did the Italians, did most Italians think of him that way? And how about Catholics in other parts of the world?

**Kertzer:**

Well, I mean, the Pope came out of the war in pretty good shape actually. When Mussolini was finally overthrown and then Rome was being occupied by the Germans, there was no functioning Italian government, so the Pope was the one point of reference, at least for many, many Romans. For example, when Rome was bombed in the summer of 1943, and by the way, it was never bombed by the Germans who presented themselves as saviors of the Christian Europe against the two big enemies of Christian Europe: the Communists and the Jews, it was the allies who bombed Rome and the Pope would protest this, but the Pope goes out after the allied planes leave to the afflicted area and offers a blessing and so on. So he is seen by many as a kind of heroic figure and in their desperation, they turn to him. At the end of the war, as you say, he begins a narrative that, by the way, isn't just a church narrative, it's also an Italian narrative, and the Pope was very much Italian, and that is that Italy was never really fascist, Italy was never really an ally of Hitler in the war, and there was just this handful of evildoers. So in that sense, we also have to see that context for understanding the narrative, that after the war got formed, about the role of the Vatican and the Pope in the war, that it can be seen as a larger narrative of exculpation that the Italians certainly had, and that's why you have the myth of the resistance in Italy. I often mention this fact. It has about 60, I think 67, institutes for the study of the resistance, which lasted at most a year or so, and just in parts of Northern Italy. It has essentially no institutes for the study of Italian fascism, which ruled Italy for twenty years. So everybody wants to talk about the resistance, no one wants to talk about fascism. There's something comparable, I think, involved in the Vatican as well.

**Griffith:**

Convenient to blame it all on the Germans, right? In the very last section of the book, Final Thoughts, I loved this part, you say that "the main question that has thus far been missing in the polemics over the long silence of Pope Pius XII is simply *when?*" Can you talk about the ways in which the war appeared differently to the Pope over time and how those different moments, how this relates to his silence in distinct moments of time?

**Kertzer:**

Yes, I think the “when?” question is crucial to understand the Pope’s behavior. In the early years of the war, it looked to a lot of people, understandably, that Hitler was going to win the war. Especially if you focus on, say, the spring of 1940, German troops rushed through the Netherlands, Belgium, get to Paris within five weeks, despite the fact that there’s supposed to be an impregnable, imaginable line. They take over Denmark, Norway, they take over the Balkans, they take over North Africa, drive the British ignominiously from the continent. So, there was very good reason to think that Hitler and his pal Mussolini were going to win the war. So from the Pope’s point of view, he thought his responsibility was to protect the church, potentially in a Europe that would come under the thumb of the Nazis, and I think his behavior needs to be understood in part in that context. Later on, if you think of the roundup of the Jews in October 1943, for instance, Rome is being occupied by the German military. The Pope is involved in ensuring amicable relations between the Vatican and the occupying military, the German military forces. So, for example, the Vatican is constantly putting out anti-resistance warnings, you know, do nothing that might hinder the activities of the German military. And then we’re segueing into the last months and year or so of the war where now it’s very clear the Germans are going to lose the war. Now we know, from these newly opened Vatican archives that the Pope is concerned that if he does anything that would be seen as helping lead to Germany’s defeat, he could be blamed by German Catholics for their defeat in the war. And the allies are calling for unconditional surrender, which he also opposes. This gets to the Communist threat. So this is simply why you have to look at when in the war if you want to understand the considerations going through the mind of the Pope and his decision to remain silent.

**Griffith:**

You have a great quote...you say this in a couple different ways, but at one point you say “the Pope sought above all, when he did speak about these atrocities, to avoid saying anything that could be deemed offensive by either side” right?

**Kertzer:**

Right and he would say this when he met with the German ambassador, he said this more than once, I hope you appreciate how careful I’ve been not to ever say anything that could be seen as critical of your side. He said that, albeit he did something else in his speeches, which I think he had tried to amidst all the baroque oratory and more theological discussions, he put in sentences that either side could use to say “oh you know, the Pope in saying this is taking our side.” So the Pope for example, the Pope would say something about the murder of innocent civilians by indiscriminate bombing and the Nazis would say “see, he’s denouncing the bombing of Germany that the allies are doing.” And the allies would be able to point to something in the same text to say “see?” The New York Times can publish editorials. Each side was eager to convince their Catholic population that the Pope was on their side and the Pope was helping this effort by sprinkling his long, one might say long-winded, oratory with something that either side could use.

**Griffith:**

And the allied and the axis forces both created actual propaganda using those few statements that he would make that way.

**Kertzer:**

Right, and the allies would also invent things. Including, you know, that the Germans had this plan to kidnap the Pope and bring him to Germany, and they'd broadcast it on radio and so forth. And we know this from, now that's why you also should be working the archives in London and in Washington because you'll find out about the allied propaganda, how they were inventing various things about Nazis trying to persecute the Vatican and so forth.

**Griffith:**

Now I want to bring this history up into our own time, which is even more uncomfortable in many ways. So you bring this all the way to 1998 in your book. In your critique on the Vatican's official 1998 "Statement on the Church and the Holocaust We Remember." And here you write, and I want to quote you directly again, and this is page 464, "a more accurate title for the document, to which Pope John Paul II added his own letter of presentation, would have been "We Choose Not to Remember." So, I'd like to ask you to say more about that, if you think this is still the case, and also maybe tell us how church authorities have received you and your work.

**Kertzer:**

Yes, so John Paul II in reaction to all the criticism about the silence of the Pope and the question of whether the Church bore any responsibility for the demonization of Jews that could have led to the Holocaust called on his cardinal-led Vatican commission for religious relations with the Jews to study the matter. They took eleven years to come up with their report, which, as was mentioned, the Pope himself wrote a preface to for his presentation in 1998, a statement called "We Remember" in English, and it took the position that the Church and Christianity more generally bore absolutely no responsibility for the demonization of the Jews that led to the Holocaust, making a distinction between what they called anti-Judaism, which they said unfortunately some sons and daughters of the Church had been guilty of over the centuries but this was purely religious-based, that is, relating to charging Jews with deicide for the crucifixion, but that it was something else, namely modern antisemitism, which was based, according to this Papal document, or this Vatican document, on social, political, economic, and racial demonization of the Jews, that's what led to the Holocaust. The problem with this is that it won't stand up to historical scrutiny, that in fact, the Church publications, including those overseen by the Vatican, were filled with demonization of the Jews based on social, economic, political attacks and that the demonization of the Jews that the Nazis use and various other pro-Nazi groups in Europe, including the Italian fascists, use, was these kinds of charges that had very little, really, to do with race, that had to do with Jews seeking world domination, Jews as behind communism, Jews as behind capitalism, Jews not being loyal to the country in which they live. All this filled the pages of Catholic publications, including those overseen by the Vatican from the very beginning of modern antisemitism in the 1880s up through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So from my point of view, that's why I wrote a book called *The Popes Against the Jews* about the role of the Vatican and the origins of modern antisemitism which was not appreciated at the Vatican, and similarly this recent book, which you see somewhere here, *Un Papa in Guerra*, that's the Italian edition which actually came out two weeks before the English edition, so at the end of May, and a week after it came out, the Vatican Daily Newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, published a full page attack on the book. Two days later, the daily newspaper of the Church Hierarchy of Italy, *L'Avvenire*, devoted a full page to pillaring me and attacking the

book. And even, and this was even a bit of a surprise for me, in a way, the American Jesuit magazine *America* gave my book to be reviewed by a lawyer who described himself as a proponent of the beatification of Pius XII, and not terribly surprisingly, he denounced the book as well. None of them would really engage in the actual archival evidence and other evidence that's in the book, but did various things, like they would say. Golda Meir, you know, said something very complimentary about Pius XII, and somebody who knew nothing about the subject said that the Pope saved 800,000 Jews, and so on. None of that was in my back, so that unfortunately seems to be the reaction.

**Griffith:**

It is difficult to reckon with the worst parts of our history, for all institutions, right? Have you had charges against you for being anti-Catholic for working in this area? And how do you respond?

**Kertzer:**

More, yeah, some of these will identify me as a Jewish-American historian, for example, and yes, I'll get charged with being...if you go online in particular, some of the more vicious stuff it tends to not be published, but if you go online you see, people will talk about the noted anti-Catholic. So it is important to say, I'm talking about the Vatican reaction, but the Catholic world is of course much more heterogenous, and there are many many Catholics, including Jesuits, Catholic priests, and other Catholic scholars who very much appreciate this kind of serious history. I'll get compliments, for example, in the work in the Vatican archives, some of the archivists will come up to me, and as long as nobody's looking, say they read my book or other material I've written and appreciate it, and hand me a copy of their own recent publication to read. It should also be said that the Catholic Church hierarchy in a number of European countries, including most recently Germany, with their Statement of the Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Germany of 2020 do recognize this history, have come to terms with it, have come to terms with it and asked for pardon. For example, the recent case of the German Hierarchy, their statements saying the Church in Germany never spoke out against the extermination underway of the Jews while it was happening, and in fact, urged all good Catholics, as the Church did in Italy too, to fight for the axis cause as part of their Catholic duty, and we now regret this. It's not that we talk about the Church and coming to terms, it depends who in the Church, where in the Church. But still, both the Vatican and the Italian Church, from my point of view, refuse to come to terms with this history.

**Griffith:**

I'm just thinking parallels to American slavery and Southerners, you know, dealing with all these histories. I want to turn to some of the questions that our kind audience members are passing in, and again, I think they're going to be collected again, so if others of you have questions you'd like to write on cards, the staff will be coming through to get those. So here's an interesting one. This one goes back to the communiques between the Prince Philip von Hessen and the Pope, so someone asks, I guess seeing this from the slide above, if von Hessen was Hitler's friend, how and why was his wife Mafalda sent to die in the concentration camps?

**Kertzer:**



Yes, in fact, Mafalda would have a very tragic end in a concentration camp in Germany and in fact the Vatican would play a role, including Angelo Roncalli, who by then would be papal nuncio in Paris, in informing the family what had happened to their daughter, the royals, the King and Queen. So von Hessen and his wife Mafalda were favorites of Hitler until the King, Mafalda's father, turned against Mussolini. How was it that Mussolini was deposed on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1943? He was deposed by the king, Mafalda's father. So when that happened, that, of course, is what then triggers Italy's departure from the war and joining the allied cause. When the armistice with the allies is announced September 8, 1943, that night, in rather ignominious fashion, the King of Italy and the Queen and their court flee without leaving any instructions behind, to the south where the allied troops are about to land, the allied troops are already on Sicily, they're about to hit the southern tip of the mainland which is where the king and queen go. But Mafalda, their daughter, had been, for various reasons, out of the country, and came back to Rome a couple of weeks later, by which time Rome is occupied by the Germans. Hitler orders her arrest so she is fooled into going off with the German ambassador and put on a plane for Germany and sent to a concentration camp. So that is in September of 1943. In August of 1944, that concentration camp, Buchenwald, is bombed by the allies. She is wounded and in the surgery that was attempted there, she died. The family didn't learn about this until many months later, until mid-spring of the following year. So this is the story of Mafalda. Although my picture maybe was one where she's giving a Nazi salute, she certainly was no big fan of the Nazis but she married this figure, an important Nazi figure. She, I think, could be seen as a victim of what was happening.

**Griffith:**

This reminds me to say...we haven't talked much about Mussolini, but he's such a fascinating figure in the book too, both personally and professionally. His relationship to Hitler, he's also sort of this lovesick puppy with this mistress he has, and competition with his wife. It's kind of a whole drama, a soap opera going on there, right.

**Kertzer:**

Yes, I don't have time to detail all his children out of wedlock and all his lovers and those of you may remember seeing a picture of his body hanging by the feet after the partisans have shot him in late April 1945, actually next to him, hanging by the feet, is his young lover, by then about 35 years old, Clara Petacci.

**Griffith:**

Some wonderful audience questions here, and my apologies in advance that I won't be able to get to them all. But, here's one that says "given the rise of the far-right in Italy today, how can books like this inform the response of the Catholic Church?"

**Kertzer:**

Yes, well, Italian politics are complicated, of course. The government that was elected several months ago is a right-wing government. The head of it, Giorgia Meloni, is the head of a party that basically grew directly out of the fascist party albeit she herself is moderated in various ways. It's interesting that just a few days ago was the anniversary of the massacre at Fosse Ardeatine and this brings up some relevant questions for us. Fosse Ardeatine, what happened was, in March of 1944 during the German occupation of Rome, a partisan group planted a bomb

and waited for a passing group of German troops and set off the bomb. It killed 33 German soldiers and Hitler himself immediately ordered that 10 Italians be murdered for every German soldier who had been murdered. It happened within 24 hours. The German authorities quickly empty the jails, send the, it turned out to be five extra people, 335 people to a man-made cave just outside Rome and shot each one of the 335 in the back of the head and then blasted the cave to bury the signs of their crime. Of those, most had been arrested for anti-fascist activity, but actually, a large number, I think it was 77, or some number around that, were Jews who had been arrested and were ready for deportation. So, as there is every year, the Prime Minister officiates a ceremony, and that ceremony just happened three or four days ago. Giorgia Meloni spoke about the fact that these 335 victims were murdered only because they were Italian, said nothing about fascism, anti-fascism, and murdered by the Germans. The left complained, saying she's trying to obscure what was going on, that these people were killed by yes, the Germans, but the Germans who were allied to the Italian fascist government at the time, and what they didn't say in their statement was and therefore the victims were all anti-fascists. The fact is, yes, that many of them were anti-fascist, but a large number, including all the young people and old people who were among the victims were arrested not because they were anti-fascist and not killed because of that, but killed because they were Jews. So it's complicated when you talk about Italian politics and how the Holocaust is now remembered and how that ties into the current concern about neo-fascism in Italy.

**Griffith:**

Thank you for that question. This is a question about the archive. Administrators of the church are known to take copious notes and keep copious records, and so someone asked "do you believe that there were documents and exhibits that you were not presented or had access to," in other words, what might still be closed, do you believe?

**Kertzer:**

Yes, this is a question that we often ask, those of us who work in the archives ask of one another and not just for this period, but for earlier periods as well. There are a couple of answers to that. One is, with respect to Pius XII, one of the issues is Pius XII was a very cautious man. So he was reluctant to put everything in writing. So there are things where it's not a matter of them being hidden, it's just they may never have been recorded in the first place. More generally, just before the opening of the previous papacy, when I was about to write the book on Pius XI in the 1920s and '30s, those archives, I met, as I've subsequently met afterward, with the bishop who's the head of the largest archive. There are a number of archives in the Vatican that I work in, but the main one, which until Pope Francis recently renamed it, was the Vatican Secret Archive, now called the Vatican Apostolic Archive, no longer secret. When I asked him this question: are you making available all the records from the papacy? And what he told me at the time was yes, everything that scholars could be interested in. He said the only thing we don't make available are sensitive personnel files. I mean it's interesting because at the time, I guess, I should have thought of it even then, it was a number of years ago, but I later realized that of all the material that's been published on the sex abuse scandal in the Church, I'm not aware of anything that's ever been published based on Vatican archives, even though I know many investigations have been undertaken of these affairs in the Vatican. That's because they're not made available to scholars and still aren't.

**Griffith:**

Very interesting. Here's one. How much did the Pope's desire to be seen as a broker of peace play into his overall silence, his reluctance to speak out against Nazi atrocities? And you do write extensively about that.

**Kertzer:**

So the Pope did, in fact he had a kind of puff piece movie made in the middle of the war, in 1942, called *Pastor Angelicum*, portraying himself as a kind of prince of peace, and he did have this ambition. He was hoping to be seen, really, as the savior of Europe from devastation of war and, of course, he was eager to avoid war. He tried to arrange a peace conference even before the war began. He would try again in the early years of the war and got nowhere. So this certainly was an ambition he held on to. And as I mentioned, he did not want to see the total defeat of Germany because he was afraid that it would lead to the expansion of the Soviet Union and communism through Western Europe. So that was what FDR and Churchill were worried about, was his calling for peace conference in 1944 and so on. They're saying no, only an unconditional surrender will do. But he still saw himself potentially as a peace broker.

**Griffith:**

And I know, jumping back and forth here, but here's a question someone asks: what are your thoughts on the fact that it was not until the second Vatican Council under Pope Paul VI in 1965 that the Catholic Church repudiated the centuries-old idea of Jewish guilt for the crucifixion death of Jesus?

**Kertzer:**

I think one thing that's important, I'm sure everybody here realizes this, but when we talk about all these issues of demonization of Jews and so on, we are talking about history, not the Church currently or the Church post-second Vatican Council and Nostre Aetate in 1965. But it did take until then, and this too is something to think about in terms of the silence of the Pope, that even after the war...For example, there were repeated requests of Pope Pius XII after the war to have the prayer that had long been in the Catholic prayer book for Good Friday, that referred to the "perfidious Jews" dropped, and Pius XII basically stalled and resisted through the rest of his papacy. One of the very first things Pope John XXIII did was eliminate that prayer. It was a fairly dramatic sea change in attitudes, in the church position, toward Jews that came with John XXIII.

**Griffith:**

I'm going to combine a couple of questions here because I think these are related. Someone asks "A few priests preached against the Nazis. Would Pacelli, as the nuncio, have had any interaction or contact with them?" And someone else asks "Were there any strong cardinals who would argue with the Pope's reluctance to act?" So in other words, what was going on? You said, of course, that others had very different views and were much more condemning of Nazi atrocities, or much more openly so than this Pope. What can you tell us about these other folks in the church leaders?

**Kertzer:**

Well, so you have to realize, he was nuncio in Germany until 1929, so of course, Hitler comes to power in January 1933, so he was not in Germany once Hitler's in power. Now it is also true, however, that there was an important Catholic party in Germany, the Center Party, and it's the position of the Church hierarchy, and we have some greater experts in the audience on this than me, but the position of the Church hierarchy was anti-Nazi, saw the National Socialist and Hitler's movement as a Pagan movement. And basically all good Catholics should be voting for the Catholic Center Party, and these were the people, too, along with other kind of conservative elite Catholics that Bocelli was most comfortable with in his years as nuncio in Germany. But it was one of the decisions made in the church, although there's still some debate about the role of Pacelli who is Secretary of State now when Hitler comes to power, in basically abandoning the Catholic party and helping to solidify Hitler's dictatorship in 1933. So in Germany there are a number of good books written about the German church during national socialism, and certainly there were some heroic priests, there were some Bishops who spoke out one way or another, I mean they certainly spoke out against some of the Nazi activities. But it was, I'd say, quite limited.

**Griffith:**

This will be the last question. Tell us the status today, such as you know, of the movement to elevate Pius XXII to sainthood, which you mentioned briefly in your opening remarks.

**Kertzer:**

Right, so there's been an effort, practically since the Pope died in 1958, to make him a saint and a process was opened up in the regular office of the Vatican for that purpose. Pope John Paul II, as part of the second millennium celebrations in the year 2000, was planning to have a beatification ceremony of two Popes the same day, in September 2000, the beatification of the hero of the liberals of the church, John XXIII, who presided over the second Vatican Council, and Pius XII, hero of the conservatives of the church and the last pre-second Vatican Council Pope. But because of protests, in part from Italian Jewish and other Jewish communities, but not only...John Paul II kind of had second thoughts and decided to substitute another kind of conservative hero in the church, but one from the nineteenth century, Pius IX, and therefore kind of less controversial today. Then Pope Benedict XVI decided that...he basically made an announcement that he probably was well to wait for the opening of the archives before going ahead with the beatification ceremony, but to keep the partisans of Pius XII happy, he issued a proclamation that Pius XII should be declared venerable, which is kind of the step right before beatification, which allows, again there are people more theologically sophisticated than I am about this here, but as I understand it, allow devout Catholics to pray to the memory of Pius XII as someone declared venerable. So some steps have been taken but I'm not aware...so there is the question of Pope Francis's attitude towards the possible beatification of Pius XII. The Pope has, as far as I know, never criticized Pius XII or shown any particular sympathy for the critics of the more official church narrative about the heroism of the Pope, but on the other hand, he hasn't, as far as I know, shown any interest in seeing this process go forward.

**Griffith:**

Thank you. And Rabbi Elizabeth Hersh will close us out.

**Hersh:**

My name is Rabbi Elizabeth Hersh, and I have the distinct honor of chairing the Newmark Institute for Human Relations at the Jewish Community Relations Council. Inspired by the legacy of Michael and Barbara Newmark, the Newmark Institute is committed to the concept of a pluralistic society where diverse religious, racial, and ethnic groups live and work together and their differences enhance the community. We are dedicated to advancing pluralism by organizing, supporting, and promoting programs and activities that foster good human relations between people of diverse backgrounds. Tonight's conversation truly embraces this mission, allowing us the opportunity to have a critical conversation about a difficult time in our shared history. To our partners, the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, the Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum, the St. Louis Jewish Book Festival, the Peace and Justice Commission at the Archdiocese of St. Louis, the Office of Mission and Identity at St. Louis University, and St. Louis County Library, we are grateful to have partners like you doing this hard work every day. It has been a pleasure working with all of you, and a sincere thank you to Professor David Kertzer for coming to St. Louis this evening to share his powerful and illuminating insight into this critical and troubling time in what is still recent history. Thank you to Professor Marie Griffith of the Danforth Center for facilitating the conversation and to all of you for joining us tonight. The evening will continue in the Women's Building Formal Lounge right across the quad with a dessert reception and book signing. Left Bank Books will be selling copies of *The Pope at War*, and we hope you will join us. Staff will be outside to help you find your way. Thank you. Good evening.

[Applause]