

**PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE**

*“The Vatican was for us like a mountain”*

**Reassessing the Vatican’s Role in Jewish Relief  
and Rescue during the Holocaust.  
Settled Questions and New Directions in Research<sup>1</sup>**

Robert A. Ventresca,  
King’s University College at Western University

**Introduction**

Among the many contested issues that have animated the seemingly endless debate about the role of Pope Pius XII and the Vatican during the Holocaust, few have yielded such widely divergent claims and counter-claims than the question of papal intervention, or lack thereof, on behalf of persecuted European Jews. I should clarify that when I speak here of papal *intervention* I do not mean to engage with that one aspect that has singularly dominated scholarly and popular attention for decades now, namely, the missing papal condemnation of Nazism and the Holocaust; the “astonishing fact” of “what was

---

<sup>1</sup> An early version of this paper was presented at the International Academic Conference on Holocaust Research, “New Scholars/New Research on the Holocaust,” University of Toronto, October 6-7, 2014; organized by the Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Chair of Holocaust Studies and the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, and the Government of Canada. Many thanks to Doris Bergen, the Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of Toronto for her constructive comments on the conference paper and to Michael Marus, Professor Emeritus of Holocaust Studies at the University of Toronto for his probing questions, especially vis-à-vis the critical interpretation of terminology used in the relevant primary source material. The author also would like to thank the journal’s anonymous reviewers for their close, critical reading of the draft manuscript and for their many incisive and constructive suggestions.

not said,” to borrow from Martin Rhonheimer.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it possible given space constraints to cover all forms of papal intervention that provided some measure of relief and assistance to Jews and others—prisoners-of-war, displaced persons—during World War Two.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, I will address specifically the competing narratives about the Pope’s and the Vatican’s role in concrete rescue and relief initiatives on behalf of Jews during the Holocaust. The use (and sometimes *mis-use*) that has been made of narratives of papal rescue and relief straddle the wartime and postwar era, blurring the lines between historical experience and its framing in postwar memory and in historical interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in the self-congratulatory narrative attributing to Pius XII a decisive role in rescue and relief efforts that was crafted by the Vatican itself already before the end of the war.

---

<sup>2</sup> Martin Rhonheimer, “The Holocaust: What Was Not Said,” *First Things* (November 2003): 18-27.

<sup>3</sup> One thinks here in particular of the information service established by Pius XII in 1939 (the *Ufficio Informazioni Vaticano*). Its mission - under the direct supervision of Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Paul VI - was to gather, catalogue and where possible respond to thousands of requests reaching the Vatican during and after the war, mainly by means of personal letters asking for the Vatican’s help in finding information on displaced persons and prisoners-of-war. In some places, most of the correspondence to and from the bureau pertained to the fate of Jewish residents. In at least one documented case, the correspondence pertaining to the fate of Jews was so voluminous that it sparked complaints from local Catholics that the information service was showing a decided “partiality” towards Jews. See ADSS 9, # 274, Cassulo to Maglione, Bucharest, 21 July 1943, pp. 410-411 and ADSS 9, #298, Maglione to Cassulo, Vatican, 20 AugUSt 1943, pp. 436-437. On the Vatican Information Service, see See *Inter Arma Caritas: L’Ufficio Informazioni Vaticano Per I Prigionieri di Guerra Istituto da Pio XII (1939-1947)*, 2 volumes, (Vatican City: Vatican Secret Archives, 2004). Cf. Léon Papeleux, *L’Action caritative du Saint-Siège en faveur des prisonniers de guerre (1939-1945)* (Bruxelles-Rome, 1991). On Cassulo’s role in Romania, see John F. Morley, *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust, 1939-1943* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc.), Chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> On questions of memory and historical interpretation in Holocaust studies as they pertain to the role of Pius XII and the Vatican, see the stimulating collection of papers Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds., *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2002).

Sensitive as they were to a gathering critique of papal inaction on behalf of persecuted Jews, senior papal diplomats countered with specific examples of the thousands of Jews in Rome—perhaps as many as 6,000, they claimed—who had been given “refuge and succor” by the Vatican, directly and indirectly, during the German occupation of the city, primarily in the form of material aid, asylum and safe-passage.<sup>5</sup> The claim of papal relief and rescue was made by Pius XII himself to deflect the constant entreaties reaching his desk during the war, often from other ecclesiastical authorities, asking the Pope to say and do more for persecuted European Jews. In a revealing exchange in April 1943 with Bishop von Preysing of Berlin, Pius XII referred explicitly to papal financial assistance to Jews—the so-called “non-Aryan Catholics” or Jewish converts—who were seeking flight from Europe starting from before 1939. “The money was given for love of God,” Pius wrote, “and We were right not to expect gratitude on earth. Nevertheless, Jewish organizations have warmly thanked the Holy See for these rescue operations.”<sup>6</sup> The Pope was referring here to the relatively small number of Jews who had been baptized as Catholics, many of them decades earlier, and to the children of intermarriage between Catholic and Jewish parents; converts whom the Church recognized as Catholics yet who were being persecuted as Jews according to the racial doctrine of Nazi and Axis states.

After the war, the Pope and senior advisors saw diplomatic advantage in publicizing widely the many public

---

<sup>5</sup> The claims were made by the Under-Secretary of State, Domenico-Tardini’s to the Taylor mission in March 1945. See RG 59, Taylor file, Entry 1068, Box 9, Taylor to the Secretary of State, “Asylum given to Jews by the Catholic Clergy during the German occupation of Rome,” 26 March 1945. The extant documentation does not explain how papal diplomatic officials had come to this number of 6,000. Nor does it appear that they were pressed by interested parties, including Allied governments, to substantiate the claim with concrete evidence.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Friedlander in *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, and reproduced here in the interview with Leiber for *Look* magazine, April 17, 1966, 46. A copy of the original is in ADSS, 2, #105, Pius XII to Bishop Preysing, Vatican, 30 April 1943, 318-327.

expressions of Jewish gratitude that were manifest in the months after the war's end. A similar dynamic emerged in the apologetic defense of Pius XII in response to Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*. To this day, some apologetic commentators, historians and non-historians, continue to make much of the many expressions after the war (and at the time of Pacelli's death in 1958) of Jewish gratitude for papal rescue and relief during the Holocaust; a selective arrangement of historical fragments comprised of Jewish voices from after the Holocaust are thereby construed as persuasive vindication of the wartime pontiff's decision-making.

We will turn below to assess the various claims and counter-claims of papal financial and material aid in Jewish rescue and relief. It is undeniably true that this subject has received a considerable deal of attention from scholars and in popular media. Consider, as one example, the recent and ongoing public controversy over the wartime record of Giovanni Palatucci, the former Italian police official long regarded as a righteous rescuer but now implicated by new research as a potential collaborator in the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> Tellingly, legitimate

---

<sup>7</sup> The list of published historical studies is long but a useful summary can be found in Susan Zuccotti, "Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy: Evidence of a Papal Directive?" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, v. 18, n. 2, Fall 2004, 255-273. See especially her footnotes for select lists of relevant studies. Another useful summary, if somewhat polemical, is Zuccotti's "Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews during the Holocaust: Examining Commonly Accepted Assertions," in Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 205-220. Although the focus is on Italy, the various contributions to the "Symposium on Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust in Italy" in February 2001 are also useful, as published in the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 7 (2) 2002: 215-268. On Palatucci, see Patricia Cohen, "Italian Praised for Saving Jews is Now Seen as Nazi Collaborator," *The New York Times*, June 19, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/20/arts/an-italian-saint-in-the-making-or-a-collaborator-with-nazis.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/20/arts/an-italian-saint-in-the-making-or-a-collaborator-with-nazis.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), accessed August 21, 2013; and her "Discredited Wartime Hero's Backers Rebut Charges," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/15/arts/discredited-wartime-heros-backers-rebut-charges.html>, accessed online August 21, 2013.

historical investigations into Palatucci's role during the Holocaust have quickly evolved (or better yet, descended) into a predictably polemical debate involving Pius XII. Writing in the Vatican's newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Italian historian Anna Foa acknowledged that it is entirely understandable and appropriate in the course of historical study to continue subjecting what she calls "hagiographic interpretations" of Palatucci's case to heretofore "scarce" historical research. Yet Foa maintains that his case is really being revisited in order to "mar" the Church of Pius XII. "[I]n targeting Palatucci," Foa suggests, "the intention was essentially to hit a Catholic involved in rescuing Jews, a champion of the idea that the Church spared no effort to help Jews." This, Foa concludes, "is ideology not history."<sup>8</sup>

In short, we can hardly say that the subject has been ignored. The problem is that even sober scholarship seems caught in what we might describe as the polemical vortex of the Pius war. Consequently, serious students of the subject find themselves working within and perpetuating an adversarial-polemical mode of discourse and analysis. Even worse, they often are susceptible to the tendency to which Anna Foa alludes—proffering ideology or better yet advocacy as opposed to historical interpretation; of blurring the lines between moral judgement and historical evaluation, thereby engaging in speculative, counter-factual discussions of what might have been or what ought to have been instead of what was, and why.<sup>9</sup> One is

---

<sup>8</sup> Anna Foa, "Meant to mar the Church of Pius XII," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 June 2013, <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/portal/dt?JSPTabContainer.setSelected=JSPTabContainer%2FDetail&last=false&path=/news/cultura/2013/143q13-II-caso-Palatucci-da-GiUSto-delle-Nazioni.html&title=To%20strike%20the%20Church%20of%20Pius%20XII&locale=fr>, accessed August 21, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> For a consideration of the relationship (notably, the differences) between historical judgement and moral judgement, with specific reference to the controversies over Pius XII and the Church during the Holocaust, see Donald J. Dietrich, "Historical Judgement and Eternal Verities," *Society* 20, no. 3 (1983): 31-35. Further instructive commentary can be found in

struck by how often in the scholarship we find a Manichean juxtaposition of “supporters” and “defenders” of Pius XII pitted against “critics” and “skeptics.” The former make untenable claims that the Pope and the Vatican played a decisive role in saving several hundred thousand Jews during the Holocaust. The most exaggerated of these would have it that upwards of 800,000 Jews were saved during the Holocaust by means of direct or indirect papal intervention.<sup>10</sup> Few scholars lend serious credence to this claim given the specious method by which it was derived, not to mention the apologetic-polemical end to which that inflated figure has been used.<sup>11</sup>

Other claims of papal assistance in Jewish rescue and relief are more credible and thus warrant sustained, critical scholarly attention, if only to place them in a properly empirical and interpretative context. My own view at present is that while Pius XII and Vatican diplomats insistently worked to avoid the explicit public condemnation being asked of the Pope, there is evidence to show that the Pope and his advisors did encourage or provide tacit approval to papal representatives and ecclesiastical entities around the world to mobilize ecclesial resources—using their own best judgement of the local situation as they knew it—to help those facing persecution. Yet the nature and extent of this high-level ecclesiastical support for relief and rescue work varied—we might even say that it waxed and waned—according to time, place, circumstance and even according to the identity of the victims. As we will

---

Paul O’Shea, *A Cross Too Heavy: Pope Pius XII and the Jews of Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); see especially the Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> The well-known source for this claim is Pinchas E. Lapidé, *The Last Three Popes and the Jews* (London: Souvenir Press, 1967) and his *Three Popes and the Jews* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), as well as various articles such as “Pius XII and the Jews,” which was published in 1964 in a Viennese periodical precisely to address what he says was Hochhuth’s “great injustice” to the memory of Pope Pius XII. A copy of this article is in the Central Zionist Archives, C2/1976.

<sup>11</sup> For an instructive empirical assessment and critique of Lapidé’s claims, methods and sources, see José M. Sanchez, *Pius XII and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 139-140.

see, in fact, the plight of “non-Aryan Catholics” elicited an early, intentional and direct intervention by the Holy See, usually working within the framework of a transnational network of ecclesiastical entities, mainly in the Americas. As for the plight of the millions of other Jews in virtually every part of Nazi-occupied and Axis Europe, the Vatican’s response conformed to a familiar pattern of self-imposed restraint and self-serving resignation. Catholic rescuers on the ground, many of them prelates such as Father Marie Benôit, might count on some modest measure of papal support, usually moral rather than financial. This was hardly tantamount to a *policy* or a *directive* of Jewish rescue and relief; even less was it evidence of an intentional scheme to furtively mobilize ecclesial resources on a massive scale to help persecuted Jews throughout Axis Europe. To be sure, it was a measure of lifesaving aid just the same. Yet, when rescue efforts came to be seen at the Vatican as too risky, or papal diplomatic intervention was judged to be futile, then papal support for relief and rescue efforts grew attenuated if not withdrawn altogether.

The question remains: how best to evaluate the nature, extent and efficacy of papal aid, quantitatively and qualitatively, so to move beyond the adversarial-polemical trope employed by supporters and critics respectively? Was papal rescue and relief “consistent and persistent,” as the Jesuit historian Robert A. Graham once claimed or was it, at best, sporadic...incidental...perfunctory”; and even “tentative, tardy, and ineffective,” as historian Susan Zuccotti sees it.<sup>12</sup> In seeking for

---

<sup>12</sup> Robert A. Graham, S.J., “How to Manufacture a Legend.” Pius XII and the Holocaust. Milwaukee: Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights (1988); Susan Zuccotti, “Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy,” 256. Interestingly, and perhaps tellingly, the extant scholarship generally relies little, if at all, on survivor testimony to substantiate or refute claims of papal rescue and relief. It appears that comparatively few survivor testimonials have been recorded from individuals who can speak directly to the question of papal aid. This makes for an incomplete, fragmentary documentary record. Further research is needed to ascertain whether more survivor testimonials exist or can yet be recorded that speak specifically of papal rescue and relief. Either way, a second line of enquiry might try to account for the comparative lack of direct first-hand accounts of papal res-

new directions in research on this contested question, an essential first step is to develop an explanatory framework with the conceptual and linguistic sophistication adequate to understand the complex and variegated forms of papal intervention during and after the war. I refer to these different forms as *vectors* of papal intervention, each with its own set of assumptions and modalities and often working in relative autonomy from the Holy See. One thinks here, for instance, of the work of papal nuncios in such places as Budapest, or of individual bishops and religious orders. While they usually acted autonomously to contribute to Jewish rescue and relief, often at great personal risk, these individuals and their respective offices and institutions were part of an ecclesial reality and self-understanding from which the Holy See, and ultimately the Pope himself, cannot be divorced.<sup>13</sup> Conceiving of vectors of papal intervention in this manner may offer a third way between exaggerated apologetic claims of papal rescue and forced counter-narratives of papal rescue and relief as tangential at best. It allows us to give proper weight to the agency of individual rescuers and institutions while also giving due consideration to the manifold ways in which individual agency was conversely enabled or constrained (according to individual circumstances and choices) within an ecclesiology that understood the hierarchically-ordered “institution” of the Church be a *corporate* reality<sup>14</sup>; that is, the visible, tangible,

---

cue and relief; something that might be explained, at least in part, by the indirect ways in which papal intervention and aid was effected and, accordingly, perceived by the presumed beneficiaries of such aid.

<sup>13</sup> For a persuasive argument to this effect, consider Andrea Riccardi, *L'inverno più lungo. 1943-44: Pio XII, gli ebrei e i nazisti a Roma* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 2008), xiii.

<sup>14</sup> The term “corporate” here is used in the traditional sense in which it has been understood in Catholic-Christian doctrine and practice. The implications of enduring corporative strains in Catholic thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and more specifically its implications for Catholic political and theological attitudes towards Jews and Judaism before, during and after the Holocaust remains largely unexplored. Historically, corporatist understandings of the church as a mystical body provided powerful justifications to exclude and marginalize non-Christians in society, especially Jews. For a fascinating insight into this dynamic in the medieval context, see David Nirenberg, “Conversion, Sex, and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval

juridical—if incomplete—expression on earth of the “mystical body of Christ”; a synthesis of the “invisible” and the “visible.”<sup>15</sup>

Let us consider two examples of distinctive vectors of papal intervention at work ostensibly to facilitate Jewish rescue and relief. As we will see, each vector reflected particular assumptions and modalities, and thus varied in magnitude and efficacy. The first goes to claims of Vatican financial and diplomatic assistance to facilitate Jewish emigration before and during the war. The second speaks to some high-profile, if private, Vatican diplomatic interventions during the war that sought to spare thousands of Jews from deportation.<sup>16</sup>

Papal diplomacy first became involved in Jewish emigration to respond to the dilemma facing so-called ‘non-Aryan Catholics,’ Jewish converts to Catholicism. The plight of these converts had been on the radar of ecclesiastical officials in Germany, Austria and Italy for a few years before the start of the war. In fact, the Holy See’s first serious attempt to address

---

Spain,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 4 (October 2002), 1065-1093.

<sup>15</sup> It was Pius XII who authoritatively defended this conception of the Church as the visible, corporeal expression of the “Mystical Body of Christ,” in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, June 1943. See especially *Mystici Corporis*, paragraphs 9, 13, 14, 23, 24. It would be instructive to explore further the theological-exegetical implications of Pius XII’s teachings on the mystical body of Christ, to discern whether or in what ways his defense of this age-old conception of the Church as the “visible” embodiment of the “mystical body” may have impacted Pius XII’s thinking about Jews and Judaism, or for that matter about any individual or group who were seen to be “cut off” from the “body” of Christ and thus of the Church. A useful summary of the theological-ecclesiological dimensions of the “mystical body” teachings, with particular insight into the 20<sup>th</sup> century context, see Edward P. Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels,” *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 70 (2005), 3-30, especially at pp. 11-12. On the reception to *Mystici Corporis*, see also Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 419-42.

<sup>16</sup> Zuccotti neatly and instructively summarizes the respective claims in her research note “Pius XII and the Jews in Italy,” 255, with detailed notes at 267.

the gathering refugee crisis of the latter 1930s—and this by means of the transnational network of ecclesiastical offices and voluntary lay organizations—was motivated by concern for the plight of these Jewish converts to Catholicism who found themselves persecuted as Jews by the fascist regimes yet either unable or unwilling to avail themselves of assistance from Jewish refugee and relief organizations.<sup>17</sup> So-called “non-Aryan Catholics” turned for help to the St. Raphael Society, a longstanding emigrant aid organization for German Catholics. In the mid-1930s, the Society established a Relief Committee for Non-Aryan Catholics empowered with the administrative and material means to facilitate the migration of German Catholics of Jewish descent. In this work, the Society could count on a measure of Vatican financial assistance, above all as a conduit for funds being raised by donors around the world, mainly in the U.S.<sup>18</sup> Where its substantive financial contribution was limited, other vectors of papal diplomacy were more readily employed. In a series of directives issued between November 1938 and January 1939, then Cardinal Pacelli instructed papal nuncios and a handful of the most powerful Catholic bishops in the Americas to do what they could to find financial and logistical means to facilitate the emigration for Catholics of Jewish descent who were impacted by Nazi and Axis racial laws. One concrete suggestion made via papal channels was for national and local churches to establish

---

<sup>17</sup> Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees from the First World War through the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 129-130; 266. A summary of these efforts, in addition to an assessment of the situation at the start of September 1939 was provided to the Vatican by Father Grösser, then General Secretary of the Raphaelsverein. See ADSS 6, #57, Berlin, 2 September 1939, including Annexe I and II, 129-134.

<sup>18</sup> A detailed report of the Society’s five years of activity up to 1944 was prepared by Father Weber for Pius XII and is reproduced in ADSS 10, #316, dated 2 September 1944, 406-412. Cf. Blet, *Pius XII and the Second World War: According to the Archives of the Vatican* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 142. For a sense of the Society’s work with German Catholic emigrants up to 1939, see Grant Grams, “Sankt Raphaels Verein and German-Catholic Emigration to Canada from 1919 to 1939,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, Volume 91, Number 1, January 2005, 83-104.

committees to aid non-Aryan Catholics by, for instance, finding teaching positions in major universities, hospitals or other Catholic entities willing and able to accommodate qualified refugees.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most cited cases of papal intervention on behalf of Catholics impacted by fascist racial laws saw the Pope intercede directly with the Brazilian government to allow the immigration of Catholic families who were affected by the racial laws and thus were desperate to leave Europe.<sup>20</sup> The Brazilian scheme was at best a qualified success, at worst an abject failure; most of the promised visas (some 3,000) were never furnished for those most in need of this lifeline. The Vatican was disappointed but took some credit in claiming that by early 1941 it had managed to issue most of the one thousand visas in its possession, with travel costs defrayed thanks to the financial generosity of a group of Jewish American

---

<sup>19</sup> ADSS 6, #3, Le professeur Schmutzer et le P. Strathmann, O.P. au Pape Pie XII, Utrecht, 10 mars 1939, 45-52, in particular Pacelli's circular letters in Annexe II and IV. Among the most active of these committees was the US bishops' Committee for Catholic Refugees from Germany (later simply the Committee for Catholic Refugees, to reflect the growing number of refugees from other parts of Europe once the war began). For a detailed first-hand account of the US Committee's activities from 1937 to the start of World War Two, see the *Report of the Committee for Catholic Refugees from Germany*, November 16, 1939. Notable committee members included Samuel Stritch, the Archbishop of Milwaukee and Joseph Rummel, Archbishop of New Orleans and the Committee's Chairman.

<sup>20</sup> See detailed report from Orsenigo to Maglione, "Immigration of Jewish-Catholic Families to Brazil," September 11, 1939, ASV, AES, fasc. 606f, n. 162, prot. 8346/39. For the perspective of the US bishops on the Brazilian scheme and related issues pertaining to the emigration of 'non-Aryan Catholics,' see the archives of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Department of Immigration, which are housed at the Center for Migration Studies in New York. See especially Collection 23, Box 75. My thanks to Mary Brown and the research assistants at CMS for their help in facilitating access to these files. For a general survey, see Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

donors.<sup>21</sup> Yet the remaining two thousand visas that were to have been distributed by the Brazilian ambassador to Germany never materialized. The Pope's direct appeal to President Vargas was not enough to overcome suspicions about the scheme. Brazilian authorities said that they could not be sure that these non-Aryan Catholics were *bona fide* converts or whether conversion was a ploy for survival and escape. By November 1941, citing new emigration restrictions, the Brazilian authorities informed the Vatican that they were suspending the visa immigration scheme.<sup>22</sup> Appeals to other governments in Latin America to ease their entry requirements to make room for so-called "non-Aryan" Catholic families from Europe also fell on deaf ears.

The failure of direct papal intervention on behalf of just a small fraction of baptized Catholics illustrates the limited nature and effect of this particular *vector* of papal intervention, conveyed by means of private diplomatic channels and relying to some extent on the material and political resources of a transnational network of ecclesiastical entities. On the one hand, it speaks to a papal diplomacy that felt empowered and justified in intervening at the highest possible levels on behalf of a relatively small group of Jewish emigrants not as persecuted Jews *per se* but as Jewish *converts*; which is to say, as

---

<sup>21</sup> This money came from the United Jewish Appeal, donated to the Vatican in the memory of Pius XI. See Maglione's letter to the auxiliary bishop of Chicago, Sheil, dated December 31, 1939 in ADSS, 6, #125, 211-212; see note 2. It was in the amount of \$125,000 for Jewish refugees, given to the Pope to be distributed by Christian organizations to all Jewish refugees, converts or not. The Vatican instructed that \$50,000 be given to the NCWC's Committee for Refugees and a committee devoted to German Catholic political refugees, headed by Mons. Rummel, Archbishop of New Orleans. The remaining \$75,000 was given to European aid organizations, principally the St. Raphael Society. See ADSS, 6, #126, Vatican, January 4, 1940, 213-214.

<sup>22</sup> See ADSS 6, #419, 524 for letter sent by Secretary General of the St. Raphael Society, Menningen, to Cardinal Maglione on December 27, 1940. Definitive word from Brazilian authorities that they would not be easing immigration or refugee quotas to deal with the European crisis reached the Vatican in mid-1942. See ADSS 8, #492 for a short note from the Brazilian embassy to the Secretariat of State, July 15, 1942, 600.

Catholics who were desperate to leave Europe in order to escape an ever-escalating campaign of racial persecution that effectively ignored what the Church recognized as their full-fledged membership in the “body” of Christ and of the Church. Yet it was a vector of papal diplomacy that proved to be contingent and qualified both in magnitude and efficacy. It is clear, for instance, that, despite grandiose claims to the contrary, the Vatican did not spend “millions” of dollars to secure visas for “Jewish” emigrants desperate to leave Axis Europe by the early 1940s.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, when confronted with the foot-dragging and then the openly expressed doubt of Brazilian authorities about the legitimacy of these converts *as Catholics*, the Holy See chose to desist in its efforts rather than to confront; to acquiesce and fall back into a familiar pattern of resignation rather than to make the case forcefully, even publicly if necessary, on doctrinal, juridical or humanitarian grounds.

Of course, this did not stop the Vatican from defending its approach and answering repeated calls for papal intervention with the standard if increasingly worn response. When a desperate Cardinal Innitzer of Vienna pleaded with the Pope early in 1941 to do something on behalf of the thousands of Jews in Vienna, many of them baptized Catholics, who faced imminent deportation, he was reminded firmly of “all that the Holy See has done and is doing for the Jews.” Pius XII sent the cardinal two thousand dollars to assist non-Aryan Catholics.<sup>24</sup> Innitzer was grateful, but this was hardly the kind of bold and decisive action he expected. The response to

---

<sup>23</sup> So claimed Ronald Rychlak in his book *Hitler, the War, and the Pope* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), 203, 365; the claim has been authoritatively rebutted by Zuccotti in her contribution to the symposium “Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust in Italy,” pp. 244-245.

<sup>24</sup> ADSS, 8, #5, Innitzer to Pius XII, Vienna, January 20, 1941, 78-79. This amount is - by the most approximate of estimates given the limited comparative data available - roughly equivalent to just under \$20,000 USD in today’s currency. This is based on calculations made through <http://fxtop.com/en/currency-converter-past.php?A=2000&C1=USD&C2=USD&DD=16&MM=04&YYYY=1953&B=1&P=&I=1&btmOK=Go%21> (accessed 4/16/2014).

the Cardinal's impassioned plea reflected the Vatican's resignation. The Undersecretary of the Sacred Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Monsignor Silvio Sericano put it plainly when he observed that "there is nothing that can be done."<sup>25</sup>

In a similar way, another *vector* of papal diplomacy, that of the direct high-level diplomatic approach, was usually reactive and limited in nature, scope and efficacy. This reflected theological and geo-political priorities that ultimately conditioned—that is, limited—the resolve to use papal resources for the care and rescue of European Jews. This was made clear in the Pope's appeal to Regent Miklos Horthy, prompted it seems by pressure from the War Refugee Board and the World Jewish Congress in June 1944, urging Hungarian authorities not to proceed with a rumoured deportation of some 800,000 Hungarian Jews. In personal and direct terms, Pius XII pleaded, if in familiarly veiled and implicit terms, on behalf of the "large number of unfortunate people" who suffered "due to their nationality or race." So Pius XII personally implored Horthy "to do everything within your power so that so many unfortunate people would be spared further grief and pain."<sup>26</sup>

The Pope's intervention on behalf of Hungarian Jews can be said to have worked insofar as it helped to push the authorities to suspend the deportations begun in the summer of 1944. As Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman acknowledge, Pius XII's "intervention," along with that of the "unusually forceful" papal representative Angelo Rotta, "stung" the Hungarian ruler. What remains unclear from the extant documentation—and here is where full and open access to the wartime archives could prove immensely useful—is whether Pius XII intervened with Horthy of his own accord or

---

<sup>25</sup> ADSS, 8, #14, Innitzer to Pius XII, Vienna, February 4, 1941, 90-92. Sericano's comment is reported in #33, Innitzer to Pius XII, Vienna, February 28, 1941, 116-119.

<sup>26</sup> ADSS, 10, #243, Pius XII to Regent of Hungary Horthy, Vatican, June 25, 1944, 328.

whether he was either anticipating or responding to what Breitman and Lichtman call “American encouragement.”<sup>27</sup> We do know that from the Holy See’s perspective at the time, and in subsequent years, Horthy’s decision in the summer of 1944 to suspend the planned deportations vindicated the Pope’s longstanding policy of pursuing diplomatic channels rather than issuing explicit public declarations. At the time, Jewish representatives acknowledged and appreciated the Pope’s efforts.<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, it was a different matter after the war when the motivations and efficacy of papal interventions were subjected to more critical scrutiny. Some prominent Jewish authorities who had been deeply involved in lobbying efforts to get the Pope to speak out on behalf of the threatened Jews of Hungary, voiced scepticism about Pius XII’s practical influence over Horthy.<sup>29</sup>

### **Logistics of Rescue and Relief: The Case of Occupied Rome, 1943-1944**

If the Pope and his diplomatic network had limited influence over foreign governments, and knew it, the same cannot be said about their influence, real and presumed, in Italy and especially in and around Rome.<sup>30</sup> Despite years of diplomatic wrangling with Mussolini’s regime on various

---

<sup>27</sup> Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 280.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, a lengthy memorandum of a conversation between Mons. Hughes, papal delegate for Egypt and Palestine, and the Grand Rabbi of Jerusalem, Herzog, in Cairo, 5 September 1944. It is reproduced at length in Friedlander’s *Pie XII e le 3e Reich*, 268-277, but a copy of the original is in Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem. Herzog here acknowledges and expresses gratitude for the Pope’s efforts. See also ADSS, 10, #357, 446, n. 4 which reproduces part of a report sent to the Secretariat of State by Myron Taylor, dated October 31, 1944 from Washington based Committee for Refugees which names Pius XII directly, as well as Archbishop Spellman, for their repeated efforts on behalf of “refugees in danger.”

<sup>29</sup> Aryeh L. Kubovy (Leon Kubowitzki), “The Silence of Pope Pius XII and the Beginnings of the ‘Jewish Document,’” 16.

<sup>30</sup> Author, (2013), 100-105.

matters, both domestic and foreign, Pius XII and his chief diplomats continued to pursue a line of diplomatic engagement. They saw it as the surest guarantee of continued Vatican leverage in political matters and, just as important, the continued autonomy of the Church in the governance of its internal life. That this leverage, however limited, could be used on behalf of persecuted Jews, including children, was evidenced by the Vatican's successful diplomatic efforts, inspired in part by direct appeals to the Holy See from the Chief Rabbi of Zagreb, to keep Italian and German authorities from deporting to Germany some 2,000 to 3,000 Jews in Croatia.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, circumstances changed dramatically in 1943 with the fall of Mussolini's regime, the virtual collapse of the Italian state and the subsequent occupation of much of Italy, including Rome, by the Germans in 1943-1944. In his classic study of Vatican diplomacy, Robert Graham underscored the highly unpredictable situation in which the Holy See found itself after the fall of Mussolini's government. In the span of a year, the Vatican was surrounded literally by three different political-military realities: the Mussolini regime, German occupiers in 1943-1944 and then Allied forces as of June 1944. It is worth noting that despite these changes, the neutrality of Vatican territory was largely preserved.<sup>32</sup> In the main, then, the church-state compact to which the Vatican agreed in its 1929 agreement with Mussolini's government "held firm," thereby

---

<sup>31</sup> Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 268. Insights on this intervention can be gleaned to some degree by the published parts of the Vatican's wartime archives. See in particular ADSS 8, #431, p. 601. See ADSS, volume 9, starting with the Introduction, especially at p. 32-34 for further detail and also #62, ADSS 9, p. 139 in which the Apostolic Visitor at Zagreb, Marcone, relays to Cardinal Maglione the "heartfelt thanks" from the Chief Rabbi of Zagreb to Pius XII for the Holy See's "effective help" in transferring a group of Jewish children from Zagreb to Turkey. For more general background and further detail, see John F. Morley, *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust, 1939-1943* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1980), especially chapter 9.

<sup>32</sup> One notable exception was the police raid of Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the Walls on February 3, 1944, an extra-territorial complex which offered shelter to refugees, including Jews, in 1943-1944.

affording the Vatican continued leverage and latitude, albeit circumscribed and tenuous.<sup>33</sup>

In light of the leverage and latitude that flowed from the Vatican's territorial integrity and sovereignty, historians have concluded that if there was one place where the Holy See could maximize its substantial influence and resources on behalf of persecuted Jews, surely it was in and around the Eternal City itself.<sup>34</sup> Predictably, the great argument over whether or to what extent the Vatican offered direct rescue and relief to Jews during the Holocaust has centered on Rome under German occupation. I do not intend to revisit the argument here; it has received its share of attention from scholars, journalists and apologetic commentators alike. Nor do I intend to enter into a protracted argument about whether or not Pius XII or his advisors provided explicit written and/or verbal orders—that elusive “papal directive”—to individuals and institutions in Rome and throughout Italy directing them to assist Jewish refugees. I accept as persuasive and definitive the case made by Susan Zuccotti that to date no reliable evidence has emerged, written or otherwise, to substantiate the claims of a *direct* papal rescue order.<sup>35</sup>

That said, I also am persuaded by the argument that the variegated structures of papal relief, which were evolving rapidly during the war, were in fact utilized in decisive ways to provide lifesaving relief and shelter to thousands of Jews in and around Rome, often with the Vatican's limited knowledge

---

<sup>33</sup> Robert Graham, *Vatican Diplomacy: A Study of Church and State on the International Plane* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), 317-318, 323. By virtue of “extraterritoriality” jurisdiction, a number of religious properties in and around Rome enjoyed ostensible protection under the auspices of the 1929 treaty. This included major basilicas like St. John Lateran and St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, as well as numerous convents, seminaries, hospitals and religious houses.

<sup>34</sup> So concludes Zuccotti. See her *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), and her “Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy.”

<sup>35</sup> See her *Under His Very Windows*, and the succinct case she makes in “Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy,” 256-257.

and tacit support. Moreover, it is clear that the Vatican's territorial sovereignty and the preservation of its territorial integrity for the duration of the war furnished vital legal and logistical latitude to rescuers on the ground, in Italy and in other parts of occupied Europe. In some places, this latitude gave ecclesiastical officials and religious institutions the license to act to the benefit of the persecuted—this included Italian and non-Italian Jews as well as anti-fascist activists—and the material means to do so constructively. Without this license to act or without tangible material means derived even indirectly from Vatican or other ecclesiastical resources, much of the rescue work attributed to brave Catholic individuals and religious institutions simply would not have been possible.

Is it feasible or even worthwhile to provide a quantitative evaluation of the Vatican's role in rescue and relief? I believe so, if for no other reason than to inject some empiricism into the discussion and to determine whether or to what extent the Vatican leveraged its global connections on behalf of the most vulnerable of Hitler's victims. In this vein, we can agree with an observation made recently by the Italian commentator Luca Possati in *L'Osservatore Romano* that the "financial history" of the Vatican in World War Two remains largely "uncharted" territory.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, one of the goals of future research might be to dissect and disentangle the complicated and largely unexplored nexus between Vatican finances during the war and the evolving structures of papal relief. It is a complex and nebulous area of research, presenting numerous challenges related to methods and sources. Yet for historians interested in understanding the dynamics of rescue and relief work, it is a promising and indeed essential line of enquiry. As rescuers readily appreciated, the question of how to pay for food, shelter and, where possible, for safe passage was both vital and vexing. In his first-hand account of the work of Jewish rescue in Italy, former DELASEM (*Delegazione per*

---

<sup>36</sup> Luca M. Possati, "The Pope's dollars against Hitler," *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 1, 2013 (English edition accessed online August 21, 2013).

*l'Assistenza degli Emigranti Ebrei*) official Settimio Sorani recalled that the “most difficult and the most tormented” aspect of rescue work was finding the funds needed for lifesaving assistance.<sup>37</sup> There is good reason, then, to attempt to reconstruct the complicated network by which funds for rescue and relief were raised and distributed, and there from to draw broader conclusions about the Vatican’s role during the Holocaust and beyond.

In its initial phases, the research and analysis presented here seeks to assess the claims made in the extant literature about how much financial and material assistance the Vatican provided to assist Jewish and non-Jewish refugees and displaced persons, along with related claims and debates about where this money came from and how it was used in the course of relief and rescue work before, during and after World War Two.<sup>38</sup> Following the money trail, as it were—to

---

<sup>37</sup> Settimio Sorani, *L'assistenza ai profughi ebrei in Italia (1933-1941). Contributo alla storia della Delasem* (Rome: Carucci editore, 1983), 150.

<sup>38</sup> For the sake of concision, we will refer usually in general terms to Vatican finances though it is important to distinguish between the distinctive parts that, taken together, comprised the Vatican’s financial apparatus. The main financial entities that managed the Vatican’s wealth and investments were the *Amministrazione per i beni della Santa Sede* (ABSS), which oversaw what is called the “patrimony” of the Holy See (that is to say, its properties, possessions, revenues derived from same. In 1887, Leo XIII established the *Amministrazione Pontificia per le Opere di Religione* (AOR), whose function was to administer finances (including stocks and bonds) of religious orders and sometimes dioceses in Italy (see Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy*, p. xv). Note: the AOR was reorganized by Pius XII in August 1942 as the *Istitutuo per le Opere di Religione* (IOR), commonly understood today to refer to the Vatican bank. In 1929, as compensation from the Italian state began reaching the Holy See following the financial arrangements of the Lateran treaty, Pius XI ordered the establishment of the *Amministrazione Speciale per la Santa Sede* (referred to simply as the Special Administration), charged with the responsibility for managing this new source of revenue. Bernardino Nogara was chosen to lead it; when Nogara is referred to as the Vatican’s or the Pope’s banker, it is in his capacity as head of the Special Administration. It is important not to conflate these three entities with “Peter’s pence” which was a separate source of papal revenue altogether, consisting of the financial donations from Catholics around the world directly to the Pope.

the extent that this is possible—necessarily entails focusing intently on the Vatican’s access to a capillary transnational network of Catholic institutions and individuals, working in structured coordination with national governments and humanitarian relief agencies, to facilitate relief and rescue. It also means connecting the story of charitable relief to a broader account of the strategic reorientation of papal diplomacy on the eve of the Cold War towards an ever-closer and we might say privileged working relationship with the US; not to mention the evolution of a *bona fide* human rights discourse in Catholic doctrine after 1945.<sup>39</sup>

On the eve of World War Two, the Vatican’s international standing and diplomatic influence had vastly increased from the time of Benedict XV’s relatively brief but active pontificate (1914-1922). Owing to the political acumen and ambition of Pius XI and his trusted Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli, the Holy See faced the onset of war in 1939 with what the historian John Pollard aptly describes as a “very healthy and extensive network of diplomatic relationships”;

---

<sup>39</sup> John Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy: Financing the Vatican, 1850-1950* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 188. The Italian historian Agostino Giovagnoli has argued that American policymakers after the war, favorably impressed by the capacity of papal relief structures to facilitate the collection and distribution of relief in wartime, actually came to prefer the papal relief commission as the privileged conduit of American postwar aid. See his “La Pontificia Commissione d’Assistenza e gli aiuti americani (1945-1948),” *Storia Contemporanea*, 9 (1978): 1081-1111; cf. Gerald Steinacher’s *Nazis on the Rur: How Hitler’s Henchmen Fleed Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 3. For a nuanced and empirical analysis of American Catholic contributions to papal relief work, see Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *The Holocaust and Catholic Conscience: Cardinal Aloisius Muench and the Guilt Question in Germany* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 21. Brown-Fleming’s detailed study of Aloisius Muench’s central role in papal relief shows that the American bishop and future cardinal was instrumental in helping to raise million dollars for relief work, mainly from American Catholic sources. On the evolution of a language of human rights in Catholic doctrine, see John A. Onorato, “Saving Grace or Saving Face: The Roman Catholic Church and Human Rights,” *Dickinson Journal of International Law* (1989) 8:1, 81-100.

this included a warming if quasi-official relationship with the Roosevelt administration. By contrast, the Vatican's financial and material situation with the coming of war was more vulnerable to political vicissitudes, both domestic and international. This stemmed in part from its physical dependence on Mussolini's Italy. In addition, gathering international tensions in the latter 1930s, which saw Fascist Italy at the centre of the maelstrom, and then the onset of war seriously impeded the flow through Italy of financial contributions to papal coffers from the faithful around the world.<sup>40</sup>

For all that, we must be careful not to take this characterization of Vatican dependence too far. After all, as Pollard reminds us the Vatican was "rather less financially dependent" on the Italians than first appears by the time Italy was at war in mid-1940. This owed mainly to the strategic management of Vatican finances by Bernardino Nogara, effectively the Vatican's chief banker as of 1929.<sup>41</sup> Arguably the single most decisive move Nogara made was on the eve of Italy's entry into war, when he negotiated the transfer of the Vatican's foreign assets, including its gold reserve with the Morgan Grenfell

---

<sup>40</sup> British historian Owen Chadwick once observed, somewhat exaggeratedly, that the Italian government could simply "switch off" the Vatican's supply of water, food and electricity and effectively "bankrupt" the papal government. See Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 132. On the state of papal finances, especially donations to Peter's Pence, see Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy*, 188. For a recent attempt to reassess the complicated relationship between the Vatican and Fascist Italy, see David Kertzer, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe* (New York: Random House, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> On Nogara, see Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy*, p. 187 and more generally Chapter 9 for more detail about Nogara's activities. We learn from Pollard, for instance, that Nogara did not always keep the Pope or the Secretariat of State in the loop about important financial transactions. See also Patricia McGoldrick, "New Perspectives on Pius XII and Vatican Financial Transactions during the Second World War," in *The Historical Journal*, 55, 4 (2012), 1059-1048; Corrado Pallenberg, *Vatican Finances* (London, 1971) and his *Inside the Vatican* (London, 1961).

bank of London to the U.S. Federal Reserve.<sup>42</sup> The transfer of these assets meant in effect that, as Pollard puts it, the U.S. Federal Reserve “became the Vatican’s major international banker for the duration of the war.” Papal officials at the time lauded this transfer of Vatican assets into US dollars as a sign of “confidence” in the American currency but also as proof of the “clear-sightedness and spirit of cooperation” between the Holy See and the US government.<sup>43</sup> The transfer gave the Vatican some much-needed latitude to continue dealing financially with neutral countries (notably to buy Swiss francs along with Spanish and Portuguese currencies) while the fascist state that surrounded the tiny, land-locked Vatican City waged its aggressive, destructive (and self-destructive) wars.

This financial latitude proved decisive after the fall of Mussolini’s crumbling regime in the summer of 1943 and the subsequent German occupation of Rome from September 1943 to June 1944. Indeed, financial latitude was a veritable life line for relief work in Rome and in much of central Italy in the last year of the war. Against the backdrop of institutional collapse, a ruinous and bitterly divisive war effort, and foreign military occupation, the Vatican emerged as a kind of central coordinating agency and advocate for wartime relief especially in and around Rome. It received financial aid and material goods—foodstuff, clothing, medicines, etc.—and then organized convoys to distribute material aid to needy areas in and around the city. According to estimates gathered by American and British officials, by 1944 the Vatican and related religious institutions were providing approximately 2.75 million meals

---

<sup>42</sup> For more on Morgan Grenfell, see Kathleen Burk, *Morgan Grenfell, 1838-1988: the biography of a merchant bank* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> The Vatican’s gold reserve in London had an estimated value of \$7,665,000; the full scale of the foreign transfer asset has yet to be definitively determined. See Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican*, 117 and Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy*, 187. For a sense of Vatican perceptions of the transfer, see the letter from Monsignor Vagnozzi, a member of the apostolic delegation in Washington, to the US Treasury Department in May 1942, in RG 131 (Department of Justice, Foreign Funds and Control Records), Box 487.

per month in soup kitchens around Rome. Reports at the time suggest that Nogara also wanted to use Vatican funds to purchase former Italian military planes to be fitted for the delivery of aid, and to provision ships to repatriate refugees and transport foodstuffs and other supplies to Italy.<sup>44</sup>

However deftly managed the Vatican's finances may have been during the war effort, the scale and diffused nature of the gathering humanitarian crisis greatly exceeded the Vatican's capacity (and willingness, arguably) to use the full range and extent of its finances in order to secure the levels of funding that were adequate to the enormous task at hand. Accordingly, financial contributions from external sources, especially in the form of voluntary contributions from Catholics around the world to "Peter's Pence"—funds donated directly to the Pope for his personal use, ostensibly in support of charitable work—became particularly vital to the maintenance of papal relief. By far, the single greatest contribution came from American Catholics. According to one report from the British representative to the Holy See for 1944, some 5 million dollars in that year alone reached the Pope from American Catholics. It is said that these funds often were delivered personally to Pius XII from high-ranking American prelates, namely New York's influential Archbishop Spellman, a close and longtime confidant of Pius XII.<sup>45</sup>

Invariably, the thousands of Jews (and others, including prominent Italian anti-Fascist politicians) who were finding shelter and sustenance in private homes, religious institutions and even in one of the Vatican's properties, if not Vatican City itself, benefited from a financial lifeline that was, quite literally, the conduit for food and other precious material aid at a

---

<sup>44</sup> NARA, RG 84, entry 2789, Records of the Political Adviser to Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean, General Records, box 47, 1944/45: Myron Taylor to Office, 31 March 1945. Cf. Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy*, 195-196.

<sup>45</sup> PRO, FO, 371/50084, Annual Report of the Minister to the Holy See, 1944, as cited in Pollard, *Money*, 203; cf. J. Gollin, *Worldly Goods: Pay Now, Die Later* (New York, 1971), 462-463.

critical juncture.<sup>46</sup> On this point, there is an emerging consensus among students of the subject, even among those disinclined to see very much substance to the claims of papal rescue and relief on behalf of Jews. For instance, although she deems it implausible to credit Pius XII with any direct involvement in Jewish rescue and relief, Susan Zuccotti allows that Vatican efforts to provide food, shelter and clothing to thousands of refugees in Rome may have extended to Jewish refugees as well. “Jews may have been among the recipients” of papal aid, Zuccotti concedes. Indeed, Zuccotti acknowledges that Vatican convoys carrying food supplies to religious houses and other institutions in Rome during the occupation of the city and after its liberation in early June 1944 included many institutions that were known to be sheltering Jews.<sup>47</sup> Yet, as Zuccotti persuasively concludes, the fact that Jewish refugees in Rome were among the beneficiaries of papal aid, direct or indirect, does not substantiate an argument for papal rescue and relief that was systematic, comprehensive and sustained; even less does it go to support mythical claims of what one recent popular book on the subject describes as the Vatican’s “secret plan” to save Jews in Rome from Nazi persecution.<sup>48</sup>

More consequential was the direct assistance offered by Catholic religious communities and lay people throughout the city as perhaps as many as 10,000 Jews, including many foreign Jews who were in Rome by this time, sought refuge in monasteries, convents and in private homes.<sup>49</sup> To date no written evidence in the form of a direct order from the Pope to religious communities in the city to shelter Jews has been found, though some contemporary diaries and postwar

---

<sup>46</sup> Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy*, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Zuccotti, “Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy,” 266.

<sup>48</sup> Gordon Thomas, *The Pope’s Jews: The Vatican’s Secret Plan to Save Jews from the Nazis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> See Blet, *Pius XII and the Second World War*, 217-218. For a balanced and historically informed treatments of the subject, including the estimate of the numbers of Jews who found shelter and rescue in and around Rome, see Andrea Riccardi, *L’inverno più lungo. 1943-44: Pio XII, gli ebrei e i nazisti a Roma* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 2008), and Zuccotti, *Under His Very Window*.

memoirs attribute to Pius XII spiritual guidance and encouragement in their work to shelter Jews and others.<sup>50</sup> By way of more official directives to enable religious institutions to engage in rescue work, Pius XII approved the instruction to lift the so-called “barriers of canonical cloister,” so as to allow both men and women to be sheltered in female and male religious houses alike. As is documented in the select publication of the Vatican’s wartime archives, the instruction was made in October 1943, on the eve of the infamous Nazi roundup of Rome’s historic Jewish quarter. It is difficult to say for certain that the decision was made specifically with the rescue of Jews in mind; regardless, its practical effect was to ease the provision of shelter by the city’s religious institutions at a critical time.<sup>51</sup>

The rescue efforts of individuals and organizations connected in one way or another to the Church to help save Jews points to both the potential capacity and to the limitations of Pius XII’s policy of diplomatic engagement. Yet ultimately his actions conformed to the well-established pattern of restraint and caution, the practical expression of the avowed policy of impartiality. Catholic rescuers could count on some small degree of assistance from the Pope. But when rescue work was seen by the Vatican as too risky for those involved, and this included the risk of violating the Vatican’s self-

---

<sup>50</sup> The most systematic and succinct argument against the claims of a “papal directive” for Jewish rescue in Rome is Susan Zuccotti, “Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy,” 255-273. See too her exchange with Ronald Rychlak in the “Symposium on Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust in Italy,” in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 7 (2) 2002, 215-268, especially at 247-250. The diaries and memoirs of various religious who helped to shelter Jews in Rome and who attributed to Pius XII moral guidance in this work, even if indirect, merit close but properly critical reading. While insightful to some extent, they do not substantiate claims of anything like a papal directive for Jewish rescue. Consider, for instance, *Inside Rome with the Germans*, the diary of Mother Mary St. Luke published under the pen name of Jane Scrivener (MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1945).

<sup>51</sup> ADSS, 9, #356, Notes de Mgr. Montini, Vatican, October 1, 1943, 496, and #382, Notes de la Secretariat d’Etat, Vatican, October 23, 1943, 518. See also Blet, *Pius XII and the Second World War*, 215.

ascribed policy of impartiality, then papal support was either seriously circumscribed or removed altogether. The work of the French Capuchin priest Father Marie-Benoît to save thousands of Jews in southern France and then in Rome at the height of Nazi occupation of the city revealed how far Pius XII was prepared to go in providing some degree of support for Jewish rescue. Yet it also speaks to the self-imposed limits of the Pope's commitment to this end; that is, to the contingent and qualified assumptions, magnitude and thus efficacy of one or another of the vectors of papal diplomacy.

The story of Father Marie Benoît, whose given name was Pierre Petuel, is well known.<sup>52</sup> For his rescue efforts on behalf of Jews in southern France and then in Italy, Father Benoît came to be known during the war as the "le Père des Juifs," "father of the Jews." After the war, he was dubbed Father Benoît "ambassador of the Jews."<sup>53</sup> Benoît's work may

---

<sup>52</sup> Lively accounts of Father Marie-Benoît's work can be found in a few different sources, starting with his own recollections, P. Marie-Benoît, "Résumé de mon activité en faveur des Juifs persecutes (1940-1944)," in *Livre d'or des congrégations françaises*, (Paris: DRAC, 1948), 305-331. Another eye-witness version is from Fernande Leboucher's *The Incredible Mission of Father Benoît*, translated by J. F. Benard (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1969). Leboucher worked closely with Father Benoît in his rescue and relief efforts. For a brief account of her work, see "Grateful Jews Help Care for a Holocaust 'Guardian Angel,'" *New York Times*, September 9, 2001, 8-14. Primary documentation pertaining to Father Benoît's relief and rescue efforts can be found in the Vatican's ADSS, confirming papal knowledge of and limited support for the Capuchin's work. See especially volume 9, 393-397; 401-402; 447-449; 465-467; 544-545. Invaluable primary documentation detailing Benoît's work is at the *Centre de documentation juive contemporaine* (Paris). For a more comprehensive look at his life, see the recent biography by Gérard Cholvy, *Marie-Benoît de Bourg d'Iré (1895-1990): Itinéraire d'un fils de Saint François Juste des Nations* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2010) and, most recently, Susan Zuccotti's informative *Père Marie-Benoît and Jewish Rescue: How a French Priest Together with Jewish Friends Saved Thousands during the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> See Father Benoît's report of DELASEM's activity, dated July 20, 1944 and reprinted in Renzo De Felice with Robert L. Miller, *The Jews in Fascist Italy: A History* (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 756-758; James

have been clandestine but it was no secret in high-ranking clerical circles in Rome and indeed at the Vatican itself.<sup>54</sup> It is estimated that Father Benoît helped to rescue upwards of four thousand Jews in Rome alone.<sup>55</sup>

By September 1943, on the eve of the Nazi occupation of Rome, Father Benoît had emerged as one of the leaders of the main Italian relief committee for Jewish refugees, the DELASEM, an organization that raised funds for relief and rescue work, and worked to procure false identity papers and find shelter for refugees in private homes and religious houses.<sup>56</sup> According to Fernande Leboucher, who worked closely with Benoît, the Vatican offered unconditional and unlimited financial support for Benoît's work. The Holy See pledged to offer "whatever funds would be needed" for the Capuchin's relief efforts, Leboucher maintained, to the tune of several million dollars.<sup>57</sup> According to Leboucher, much of the money came from American Catholic sources, in fact, as well as from British sources, and was channelled to Jewish relief work through American and British delegations at the Vatican. It is important to underscore: this was not the Vatican's money as such. Even still, the argument goes, various individuals and agencies associated with the Holy See, including its war relief offices and the Secretariat of State, were material-financial

---

Rorty, "Father Benoît: Ambassador of the Jews," *Commentary*, December 1946, 507-513.

<sup>54</sup> When Benoît met with Pius XII in July 1943, he confirmed the approval of the Superior-General of the Capuchins, Father Donato Wynant a Welle (1890-1972), a Belgian who was head of the Order between 1938 and 1946. See ADSS, 9, 394, n. 6.

<sup>55</sup> This according to the *Livre D'Or*, 306.

<sup>56</sup> For a brief history of Delasem, see Sandro Antonini and Alberto Cavaglioni, *Delasem: storia della più grande organizzazione ebraica italiana di soccorso durante la seconda guerra mondiale* (Genoa: De Ferrari, 2000).

<sup>57</sup> Leboucher, *Incredible Mission*, 167-168. She cites the figure of four million dollars, presumably as the dollar figure equivalency at the time she wrote the memoir.

conduits that supported DELASEM's work on behalf of Jews in Rome and elsewhere.<sup>58</sup>

Yet a close reading of the relevant primary sources suggests a much more complicated picture than Leboucher's account conveys. As Susan Zuccotti notes in her recent study of Father Benoît's role in Jewish rescue during the Holocaust, the financial operations related to DELASEM's work in Italy and claims that the Vatican served as a vital material conduit for that work are a matter of "much confusion."<sup>59</sup> Zuccotti attributes the confusion to efforts after the war by Pius XII's former advisors and confidants, principal among them Father Robert Leiber, to craft a highly selective and predictably favourable narrative of papal aid in Jewish rescue. A main thread of the narrative identified the Vatican as the source of substantial financial and material assistance to enable Jewish rescue during the German occupation of Rome (admittedly drawing on funds that had come to the Holy See mainly from American Catholic sources). Writing in 1961 for the authoritative Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Father Leiber claimed that when DELASEM offices in Genoa were closed with the German occupation of the city, the organization gave some 5 million lire to the Archbishop of the city, Cardinal Pietro Boetto, who then passed these funds along to a papal diplomatic official in Rome. This official in turn channelled the funds to Father Benoît to be used for Jewish rescue and relief in Rome. Speaking favourably of Father Benoît's "tireless" work, Leiber argued that by war's end the Capuchin had received some 25 million lire from Pius XII for Jewish rescue. This was roughly equivalent to just over 2 million dollars in 1961, the year in which Leiber's article was published, (and roughly equivalent to over 15 million dollars today). All told, according to Leiber, a conservative estimate of the amount of money provided by Pius XII for Jewish rescue and relief by war's end amounted to the equivalent in 1961 of something

---

<sup>58</sup> See Father Benoît's July 20, 1944 report on DELASEM's activity, reprinted in De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, 757-758.

<sup>59</sup> Zuccotti, *Père Marie-Benoît and Jewish Rescue*, 179, 221.

like 4 million dollars, or approximately 31 million dollars in today's terms.<sup>60</sup> As noted above, this was not the Vatican's money for the most part. Leiber readily acknowledged that the major sources of funding were the Catholic Committee for Refugees in the U.S., and American Jewish donors. Leiber's operative point, presumably, was that the Pope and papal channels were a uniquely effective conduit at a time of war and military occupation, providing both the latitude and the means to receive vital financial aid from abroad, and to distribute it in a timely and efficacious manner.<sup>61</sup>

These postwar claims of a substantial and decisive papal role in financing Jewish rescue and relief in Italy during German occupation sparked immediate retorts from former DELASEM leaders and Father Benoît. They objected that Father Leiber's account gave a false impression of the scale, scope and motivation of papal aid in Jewish rescue and relief. For one, the monetary figures Leiber cited were erroneous as were the circumstances by which funds reached Father Benedetto and DELASEM in Rome. Father Benoît acknowledged receiving money from DELASEM in Genoa with Cardinal Boetto as the conduit. But, in the first instance, it was just one million lire, not five million as Leiber claimed. Moreover, the money did not reach Father Benoît by means of the papal nuncio in Rome; rather, the Capuchin travelled to Genoa in

---

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that currency exchange equivalencies such as these can be misleading insofar as they fail to capture what the effective value and purchasing power of money would have been at the time the original funds were spent. In other words, the money Father Leiber claims was provided for rescue and relief efforts during the war, whatever we might say about the exact dollar amounts, may have gone further in terms of purchasing power at the time than the equivalent in today's currency. Many thanks to my colleague Graham Broad of King's University College at *Western University* for his instructive insights in this regard.

<sup>61</sup> Leiber, "Pio XII e Gli Ebrei di Roma, 1943-1944," p. 452. My calculations are based on information provided by <http://fxtop.com/en/currency-converter-past.php?A=2500000000&C1=ITL&C2=USD&DD=25&MM=02&YYYY=1961&B=1&P=&I=1&btmOK=Go%21> (accessed 8/13/2013) and the CPI Inflation Calculator at <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl> (accessed 8/13/2013)

April 1944 to retrieve the funds personally from the Cardinal. Father Benoît and former DELASEM leaders, notably Settimio Sorani, emphatically denied that any money to support their work in occupied Rome came directly from the Vatican. Father Benoît did acknowledge receiving financial assistance, to the tune of 98,000 *lire*, from Monsignor Antonio Riberi from the *Pontificia Commissione Assistenza*, the papal relief agency established in 1944.<sup>62</sup> Yet he specified that this money came *after* the liberation of Rome not during occupation. Moreover, the money was intended to alleviate the situation of a small group (probably around 100 or so) of Jewish converts—“Italian Catholic Jews,” as Father Benoît described them—who either could not count on or did not seek material assistance from Jewish relief organizations.<sup>63</sup> Faced with its own challenges in meeting the needs of a much larger number of Jewish refugees in and around Rome, and highly suspicious if not contemptuous of converts—especially those whose conversions were recent—the DELASEM was inclined to regard the Jewish converts to Catholicism as “foreigners,” if not as “deserters or apostates.” For their part, the converts, many of whom, it was reported, felt fully and truly “members of the Church,” found it “humiliating” to turn to Jewish organizations for help. Fearful that the dilemma might lead some of them to question their new-found faith or, worse yet, “return to the old one,” Fathers Benoît and Weber urged the Pope to afford a special measure of support designated “exclusively” for the material and spiritual well-being of converts; it would make them feel that “because they are Catholics, they are not excluded from charity, and that there is someone looking out for them.”<sup>64</sup>

During the German occupation, however, direct financial assistance from the Vatican’s own resources for Jewish

---

<sup>62</sup> On the PCA, with particular emphasis on the role of American financial aid after the war, see Agostino Giovagnoli, “La Pontificia Commissione Assistenza e gli aiuti americani (1945-1948),” *Storia Contemporanea*, 9 (1978), 1081-1111.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted by Zuccotti, *Père Marie Benoît*, 195.

<sup>64</sup> So wrote Benoît and Weber in their letter to Pius XII, dated 2 September 1944. See ADSS 10, #315, 403-406.

rescue and relief was not immediately forthcoming, when at all. Father Benoît recalled that when he and several leaders of Rome's Jewish community approached Monsignor Riberi in September 1943 to ask for a loan from the Vatican, they were told sharply, "The Vatican does not make loans; if it has it, it gives it." In light of such a response, Benoît recalled in later years, "we left with nothing."<sup>65</sup>

For their part, the Pope and his advisors were on record *at the time*, and in subsequent years, contending that the Holy See did in fact furnish financial and other forms of material assistance to support the work of Father Benoît and others.<sup>66</sup> When the Vatican's select wartime archives were published decades after the war, Father Benoît sought to place the Vatican's documentary record of aid in the context as he recalled living it. Referring to the unnamed Vatican officials who claimed to have provided him with money and foodstuffs, Benoît retorted, "[t]hey also speak of foodstuffs. To whom would they have delivered them?" He went on at great length to contest an emerging quasi-official version of decisive papal support for Jewish rescue and relief. As he recalled, "[t]o read the totality of these observations, one would think that the editors wanted to present my activities as a dependency of the Vatican... [b]ut it is not exact. I received no mission from the Vatican, because I was unknown there...The Vatican was for us like a mountain. We were in a hurry."<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Quoted by Zuccotti, *Père Marie-Benoît*, 180.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, ADSS 9, #415, Vatican, 6 novembre 1943, p. 549 and ADSS 9, #412, Vatican, 9 janvier 1944, 544.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted by Zuccotti, *Père Marie Benoît*, 182; original is Père Marie Benoît, "Mon action en faveur des juifs persecuté à la seconde guerre mondiale," Archives des Capucins de France (ACF), Paris, 13 LM 97. Father Benoît's perspective casting the Vatican's role essentially as tangential and indirect, if not an obstacle, is corroborated by a number of credible sources. For instance, Settimo Sorani's detailed summary report of DELASEM's activities in Italy after the armistice of 8 September 1943, circulated to British and American representatives to the Holy See. Settimo Sorani, "Attività della DELASEM dopo l'8 Settembre, 1943," in RG 59, Taylor Mission files, "300, Jews", p. 11. Reproduced in Sorani's *L'assistenza ai profughi ebrei in Italia*, Appendice 43, 291-298, at 295. See

## Under Papal Cover? Vatican Sovereignty and Latitude for Rescue

The extant historical record permits us to make two broad observations of the ostensible Vatican role in Jewish rescue and relief. First, it is clear from the documentation presently available for intensive study that the Vatican did not provide significant amounts of direct financial or material aid explicitly for the purpose of Jewish rescue and relief. Where such direct aid was provided, it was to assist Jewish converts to Catholicism. These were no less deserving of aid, to be sure, but their situation was unique, as we have seen. At most, the structures of papal relief—which amassed and distributed vast quantities of foodstuffs and other supplies mainly for Catholics in need, and which could count upon sizable financial contributions generated by means of a transnational network of ecclesiastical entities and lay organizations—were utilized to provide collateral assistance to an undetermined number of Jewish refugees. At the same time, by virtue of its diplomatic impartiality—which preserved the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Vatican and papal representations across Europe the Vatican could be used to provide vital protected spaces to enable Jewish rescue and relief; so too did its financial latitude, greatly increased as we have seen with the transfer of Vatican assets to the U.S. in the early part of the war, help in some limited sense to make this work possible.

The importance of protected spaces and financial conduits to Jewish rescue and relief is aptly illustrated by the scramble in the first half of 1944 to secure money that was desperately needed to furnish assistance to an estimated 3,000 “needy” Jewish refugees in the Eternal City.<sup>68</sup> This is how

---

also Taylor Mission files “310 Jews.” US Relations with the Vatican and the Holocaust, 1940-1950 Collection. NARA II. Archives Unbound. Web. 22 July 2013. Gale document no. SC5001137198.

<sup>68</sup> See Settimio Sorani’s detailed summary report of DELASEM’s activities in Italy after the armistice of 8 September 1943, circulated to British and American representatives to the Holy See. Settimio Sorani, “Attività della DELASEM dopo l’8 Settembre, 1943,” in RG 59, Taylor Mission files,

Settimio Sorani of DELASEM described the situation to British and American officials in late June 1944, adding that his organization's financial resources were completely depleted. There was urgent need for an immediate and substantial infusion of financial aid from outside Italy. The obvious and ready source was the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) which, by means of separate transactions, was prepared to provide DELASEM with \$120,000 (an initial credit of \$20,000 was made available in May 1944, with an additional credit to the tune of \$100,000 offered for the remainder of the year). The challenge was to get these transferred clandestinely into Italian lira (at a time when foreign exchange dealings were severely curtailed by law, if not prohibited altogether) and into the hands of DELASEM representatives in Rome like Sorani.<sup>69</sup> DELASEM officials would use the cash on hand to cover expenses related to rescue and relief efforts in the city.

With its territorial integrity and financial latitude preserved, the environs of Vatican City were the obvious locus for this clandestine financial operation. Sorani and Father Benoît, working with D'Arcy Osborne, the British representative to the Holy See and Harold H. Tittmann, Jr., the American chargé d'affaires with the U.S. mission, devised a covert scheme to transfer AJDC funds to DELASEM. It seems clear that the Vatican was not involved in any official capacity in the clandestine transfer of funds. The historian Michael Phayer argues that far from helping, the Vatican actually "refused to allow its bank to be used for this purpose."<sup>70</sup> Here again, a careful analysis of the sources argues for a more qualified conclusion. Recently, Patricia M. McGoldrick, who has made a

---

"300, Jews", p. 11. Reproduced in Sorani's *L'assistenza ai profughi ebrei in Italia*, Appendice 43, 291-298.

<sup>69</sup> See United States Treasury Department, *Documents pertaining to foreign funds control* (Washington, D.C., 1943); Sim C. Binder, "Practical aspects of foreign property control," *New York University Law Quarterly Review*, 19 (1941), 1-30.

<sup>70</sup> Phayer, *Pius XII, the Holocaust and the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). This is yet another area where full opening of the wartime archives may yield some important insights into the Holy See's formal knowledge, if any, of these financial transactions.

preliminary study of Vatican financial transactions as reflected in select British diplomatic and financial records, offers a persuasive challenge to Phayer's claims of a Vatican refusal. McGoldrick shows that Phayer's claim that the Vatican actually tried to *block* the transfer of AJDC funds intended for the DELASEM is based on an erroneous conflating of two "quite disparate documents."<sup>71</sup> What Phayer takes to be Vatican refusal to allow the transfer of funds actually applies to a *different* proposed transaction than the one involving AJDC funds.<sup>72</sup>

The Vatican's chief diplomats indeed were anxious to avoid seeing Vatican finances caught up in questionable and possibly illegal transactions, even if these were for charitable purposes. It is clear that British and American officials were similarly careful to avoid seeing their respective official channels used for risky financial transactions. Writing in May 1944 to Harold Tittmann about DELASEM's scheme to access the AJDC credit, D'Arcy Osborne expressed relief that clandestine financial transactions for Jewish relief were removed from British or American channels. With satisfaction, Osborne observed that the respective Jewish relief organizations would have to settle financial accounts with each other at some future stage, noting "we are no longer concerned or interested in their devious financial operations."<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> McGoldrik, "New Perspectives on Pius XII and Vatican Financial Transactions during the Second World War," 1036-1037.

<sup>72</sup> McGoldrik, "New Perspectives on Pius XII and Vatican Financial Transactions during the Second World War," 1036-1037. To be sure, there was at least one (and probably many others for which we do not have recorded evidence) proposed transaction to which the Vatican did object. And this transaction did also involve the proposed transfer to Italy of DELASEM funds from London. The scheme was proposed by an Italian count Carletti (presumably Carlo Carletti, an honorary papal guard). To follow the thread of original correspondence, see ADSS 10, #103, 177-179.

<sup>73</sup> "310 Jews" .d. US Relations with the Vatican and the Holocaust, 1940-1950 Collection. NARA II. Archives Unbound. Web. 22 July 2013. Gale document no. SC5001137198.

Still, neither foreign diplomats nor certain well-placed Vatican officials, and arguably not even the Vatican's Secretary of State nor the Pope himself, were completely averse to using the physical cover of the Vatican as a conduit for aid to support Jewish rescue. In the end, the cover of a sovereign Vatican City with global connections was indispensable to the work of DELASEM. The pivotal Vatican insider was the French Monsignor Joseph Herissée, who, as a canon at St. Peter's basilica, lived and worked within the confines of Vatican City and resided in the Santa Marta residence where foreign diplomats to the Holy See also lived during the war. Herissée has been described as the "leg man" of covert operations to transfer funds gathered abroad to DELASEM.<sup>74</sup> Father Benoît considered Herissée an indispensable "intermediary"; a veritable "godsend."<sup>75</sup> In his account of how the AJDC funds for 1944 made their way to DELASEM in Rome, Sorani identified Monsignor Herissée as the lynchpin of the clandestine operation.<sup>76</sup>

It is almost certain that this clandestine operation took place without the direct knowledge of the Pope or his senior advisors, let alone with their approval or encouragement. As we saw above, the Secretary of State (like British and American officials) was pronouncedly skittish about any hint of Vatican involvement with exchange transactions that skirted the bounds of legality and risked raising the ire of the unpredictable forces that surrounded Vatican City. To those who were directly involved in the dangerous work of rescue, the Vatican's reticence smacked of timidity. When Angelo Donati, a prominent Italian Jew involved in various rescue and relief schemes, first met Monsignor Herissée in August 1943, he asked whether the canon might arrange a meeting with high-ranking Vatican officials to discuss the Jewish question.

---

<sup>74</sup> See Harold H. Tittmann, Jr. *Insider the Vatican of Pius XII: The Memoir of An American Diplomat during World War Two* (Doubleday, 2004), 190.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted by Zuccotti, *Père Marie Benoît*, 182.

<sup>76</sup> Sorani, *L'assistenza ai profughi ebrei in Italia*, 152-153; cf. Zuccotti, *Père Marie-Benoît*, 173-175.

Herissée responded curtly that there was little point bothering with “high prelates” since they were “very timid and won’t do anything.”<sup>77</sup>

Yet the fact remains that immediately after the war, Father Benoît readily acknowledged that Pius XII knew of his rescue work, and that various ecclesiastical entities in Rome had been mobilized in some manner or another to facilitate Jewish rescue or at least provide much-needed cover especially during the most dangerous period of German occupation. In early July 1945, speaking to the Jewish Circle of Rome on the subject “The Jewish Christian Friendship,” Father Benoît testified plainly to Pius XII’s role in enabling Jewish rescue. The Capuchin explained that the purpose of his talk was not “to speak of what Christians have done for Jews, *approved, encouraged and helped in every possible way by their supreme Head, Pope Pius XII,*” but rather “to show the motives that determined this action.”<sup>78</sup> There may have been more than a tinge of polite diplomacy in this generous assessment; a politic way of promoting goodwill all around during a delicate phase in Jewish-Christian relations. Still, it is clear from the Vatican’s published wartime archives and from Benoît’s accounts that Pius XII did provide some measure of assistance and support for Father Benoît’s work when the two men met privately in July 1943.<sup>79</sup> Not surprisingly, there was an unmistakable air of resignation in Pius XII’s response to Benoît’s various requests. The Pope seemed to think it was futile, for instance, to press the case with German or French authorities to improve the conditions and treatment of Jews being held in camps in France; these officials, the Pope reasoned, had long been impervious to criticism of their anti-Jewish policies, even to Vatican intervention. But where the Pope and his advisors

---

<sup>77</sup> Récit de Monsier Angelo Donati, n.d., CDJC Paris, CCXVIII-78.

<sup>78</sup> Conférence donnée par le père Marie Benoît devant les membres du cercle juif à Rome le 08/07/1945 sur l’amitié entre Juifs et Chrétiens, CDJC Paris, 1945, X-90. Emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> All of this is recounted in the *Livre D’Or*, 309-311, while corroborating official Vatican documentation is in the ADSS, 9, 393-397.

thought they could make a difference, they were willing at least to try, albeit in rather attenuated ways.<sup>80</sup>

### New Directions in Research

How might further study of the contours of wartime papal rescue and relief contribute to our understanding of salient issues in Catholic-Jewish relations during and after the Holocaust? To put the question in narrower terms, how did wartime papal relief efforts, however we might measure and/or assess these, factor into Pius XII's postwar theological-doctrinal assumptions and geo-political priorities and strategies? We know that already before the war was over, the Pope had turned his mind to the question of the postwar order and the need as he saw it for a re-ordering of the social, political and economic order, both for nation-states and in international affairs. Mindful that representatives of the major powers were busily planning for the future of international relations, Pius XII added his own voice by acknowledging that an "old world" was passing away and that peoples everywhere longed for "*un nuovo mondo*," a new world, to rise from its ashes.<sup>81</sup>

In June 1945, in his first major speech after the fall of the Third Reich, Pius XII turned again to articulate his theologically informed geo-political vision, identifying as a chief priority the reconstruction of Europe and the evolution of a new world order.<sup>82</sup> This included the promotion of a normative ideal of democratization that effectively sought to marginalize and delegitimize communism within the parameters both of domestic politics and in international

---

<sup>80</sup> ADSS, 9, #311, Le nonce a Madrid Cicognani au cardinal Maglione, Madrid, August 24, 1943, 447-449; Father Marie Benoît, *Livre D'Or*, 311.

<sup>81</sup> From Pius XII's speech of September 1, 1944 reproduced in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII*, Sesto anno di Pontificato, 2 marzo 1944- 1 marzo 1945 (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1961), 121-132.

<sup>82</sup> See the official version of the speech printed in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 37 (1945): 163-165 and reported in the the *New York Times*, "Pope Sees Danger of a New Tyranny in Europe's Chaos," June 3, 1945, 1 and 22.

affairs.<sup>83</sup> It was a strategy that aimed ultimately at the “moral” rehabilitation of the international order on the eve of the Cold War. Pius XII’s envisioned “new world” would therefore be defined by a Christian-democratic European and international state system; this new world order would in turn serve as a political and spiritual bulwark against the ubiquitous and gathering communist menace.<sup>84</sup>

It is not clear where Jews and Judaism fit, if at all, in Pius XII’s “new world” order. Tellingly, the Pope’s roadmap for postwar reconstruction and rehabilitation contained no explicit acknowledgement or words of comfort for European Jews or for the future of Jewish life in Europe. There were a few familiar references to “crimes committed against mankind,” and to the use of “scientific methods” to eliminate people who were “often innocent.” He even spoke directly and empathetically about the uncertain future facing Germany’s “unfortunate youth,” victims, as Pius XII, of the Hitler state. The absence of any explicit mention of the Jews underscored a stubborn unwillingness or inability to grasp (or to acknowledge publicly) the destructive nature and scale of the Nazi war against the Jews. Certainly any hopes were quickly dashed for some sober self-critical reflection about the problem of lingering anti-Semitism or the damaging legacy of anti-

---

<sup>83</sup> For an example of how the communist/anti-communist dynamic was manifest in the midst of a democratic transition, see the case of Italy as discussed in Andrea Mariuzzo, *Divergenze parallele: Comunismo e anticomunismo alle origini del linguaggio politico dell’Italia repubblicana (1945-1953)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Tara Zahra, “‘A Human Treasure’: Europe’s Displaced Children between Nationalism and Internationalism,” *Past and Present* (2011), Supplement 6, 332-350, here at 332. For a brief but highly instructive consideration of the relevant historical questions addressed – and often overlooked – in the scholarship on European reconstruction, see Mark Mazower, “Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues,” which introduces the special supplement issue of *Past and Present* in which Zahra’s article appears. See *Past and Present* (2011), Supplement 6, 17-28.

Judaism. It reflected the simple fact that Pius XII had other priorities, both doctrinal-ecclesial and geo-political.<sup>85</sup>

So it was that when leading Jewish and Catholic figures after the end of the war called upon Pius XII to address the lingering legacies of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in parts of European society, they were met with a steady, studied response that such an acknowledgement was unnecessary, superfluous. For the Pope and his senior advisors, there was no need for a papal statement to address the thorny question of Catholic-Christian complicity in the events that led to the Holocaust or of the lingering prejudices that continued to threaten Jewish survivors.<sup>86</sup> Nor was there much practical papal assistance forthcoming to help decimated Jewish communities to recover physically and culturally, above all by means of a massive relief effort on behalf of Jewish refugees and in the search for Jewish children who had survived the Holocaust in Catholic homes and institutions.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> For an authoritative discussion of the “mental horizons” of the Catholic thought on Jews and Judaism on the eve of the Holocaust, see John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>86</sup> The most succinct and instructive analysis of this period is provided by Michael R. Marrus, “A Please Unanswered: Jacques Maritain, Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust,” in Eli Lederhendler, ed., *Jews, Catholics and the Burden of History* (Oxford University Press, London and New York, 2005), 3-11. A briefer analysis can be found in Marrus, “The Ambassador and the Pope: Pius XII, Jacques Maritain and the Jews,” in *Commonweal*, October 22, 2004, 14-19. For evidence that the Pope and some of his most trusted advisors and confidants harbored similar prejudices or at least insensitivities, see the Introduction to Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *The Holocaust and Catholic Conscience*.

<sup>87</sup> The role of Catholic religious houses in the rescue of Jewish children, especially female religious orders in France and Poland for instance, is studied in Madeleine Comte, *Sauvetages et baptêmes: Les religieuses de Notre-Dame de Sion face à la persécution des juifs en France (1940-1944)* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001), and Nahum Bogner, “The Convent Children: The Rescue of Jewish Children in Polish Convents During the Holocaust,” *Yad Vashem Studies* vol. 27 (1999): 235-285. For a concise of the postwar custody issue as it pertains to the Vatican, see Michael R. Marrus, “The Vatican and the Custody of Jewish Child Survivors after the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21 no. 3 (Winter 2007): 378-403, here

How did assumptions about wartime papal rescue and relief factor into the Vatican's obdurate refusal to rethink its responses to the plight of Jewish communities after the war, let alone to engage in a theological-historical reassessment of the papacy's relationship with Jews and Judaism? By war's end the Vatican was positioning itself as the chief patron of a functional transnational anti-communism whose priorities aligned little, if at all, with those of Jewish and humanitarian relief agencies. In a real sense, the limits of papal aid in Jewish relief and survival in the wake of the Holocaust were laid bare by these priorities. The lingering influence in theological-ecclesial terms of traditional anti-Judaism, coupled with deeply rooted and unresolved suspicions about the continued presence of Jews in European social and civic life, left Pius XII on the horns of a dilemma that was largely of his making. Called during and after the war to address the plight of European Jews, the Pope and his representatives on limited occasions invoked humanitarian and charitable Christian impulses and often acted accordingly, if usually indirectly, to address the material and physical well-being of many Jews. Yet the absence of a political theology to justify a robust doctrinal defense of the civil rights and social-economic status of Jews reinforced geo-political priorities and choices after 1945 that betrayed lingering papal ambivalence about (if not hostility to) the place of Judaism and Jews in the envisioned new world order that was Christian and corporatist in inspiration and organization.<sup>88</sup>

---

at 382. Indispensable first-hand insights are provided by Gerhart M. Riegner, then director of the World Jewish Congress's Geneva office and one of the central figures of the postwar relief effort. See his memoirs, *Never Despair: Sixty Years in the Service of the Jewish People and the Cause of Human Rights* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006, in Association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). Some valuable primary documentation on the efforts to locate Jewish child survivors, especially those who were in gentile homes, can be found in the Central Zionist Archives, S26/1402. My thanks to Sara Palmor in Jerusalem for her diligent research assistance in locating some of this material.

<sup>88</sup> For a brief but highly instructive consideration of the relevant historical questions addressed – and often overlooked – in the scholarship on European reconstruction, see Mark Mazower, “Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues.” See *Past and Present* (2011), Supplement 6, 17-

---

28. See especially Tara Zahra, “‘A Human Treasure’: Europe’s Displaced Children between Nationalism and Internationalism,” *Past and Present* (2011), Supplement 6, 332-350, here at 332.