

Cromwell, John. *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pope Pius XII*. New York: Viking, 1999. vi + 430 pp. Preface, prologue, notes, and index.

Thesis: According to the preface, at first John Cromwell wants to clear Pius XII of wrongdoing during the Holocaust. However he says that after doing his research that the evidence led “not to an exoneration but to a wider indictment.” (viii)

Themes: Cromwell reiterates tirelessly on the complete monarchical power of the church and the Pope. This begins very early in the book. He talks about Pope Leo XIII as “settled in his sense of absolute monarchical authority.” (29) This authority according to Cromwell culminates with Eugenio Pacelli installed as Pope Pius XII.

Cromwell also focuses on Pacelli's rise to power before the Second World War. He discusses Pacelli's installment as archbishop of Sardes on May 13, 1917, and by May 25 he was installed at the nunciature in Munich. An encyclical from Pope Pius XI condemning anti-Semitism was delayed until days before Pius XI's death and “Pacelli... was to bury the document deep in the secret archives.” (192)

Another theme is Pacelli's relationship with Hitler after becoming Pope. Cromwell demonizes Pius for addressing letters to “the illustrious Hitler” and for having the German Archbishop open a gala for Hitler's 50th Birthday.

There is also a theme of firsts in Cromwell's book, which, incidentally, have little if nothing to do with Pius's Holocaust actions. But, he notes that Eugenio Pacelli's was the first papal coronation broadcast by radio, to be filmed in its entirety, and the first to be performed in the open air before the multitudes, since 1846. (212)

Only one chapter is devoted to the Holocaust, which seems the whole book would have been, since it was analyzing the role of Hitler's Pope. Cromwell quotes a German speech on the final solution involving Croatia, which was under “Pacelli's special favor.” The speech said, “the essential questions have been resolved,” (279) and they are no longer a problem.

Cromwell's main theme with Pius XII and the Holocaust is indifference. Cromwell mentions the Pope's “self-imposed silence” and asks: “So, did not moral and human considerations involved in the murder of millions merit a ‘candid word’?” (296)

The only strong connection between Pope Pius XII, the Holocaust, and Hitler that Cromwell makes is the Pope's friendliness with Hitler, and the silence and indifference of the Holocaust.

Style: John Cromwell's style is very conversational. His book is written for a popular audience and flows very easily from topic to topic, even the asides to Orson Wells, or other authors are strategically placed to keep the readers interest. The book is set up like a biography, beginning with the childhood of Eugenio Pacelli, and

ending with his death. The book is actually less a biography than it is a chronological recount of events revolving around one man.

Evidentiary Base: For an author that claims unprecedented access to the Vatican Archives, nothing earth shattering appears in his works cited or notes. In fact, most of the sources used by Cromwell appear to be secondary sources. Books such as *German Churches Under Hitler*, and Friedlander's *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, are more heavily relied on than secret letters uncovered in the Vatican.

Strengths: *Hitler's Pope* was written for a popular audience, and with a title like that, it could not help but sell. Cromwell explains things decently, even things that need no explaining. He uses Pacelli's world travels to interest people that may not have an interest in the Papacy or the holocaust in particular, almost like a world politics history. Cromwell also writes more on European history than the history or biography of the Pope, so it should engage more than just Catholics.

The book's strongest point is that it shows that ideological superpower, even when backed by the wealth of the Vatican, cannot be wielded in the same way as physical or military power.

Weaknesses: This is a weak argument at best, and any strong evidence seldom backs up the author's point. Spotty research is quoted, including "Research done for BBC producer Jonathan Lewis." (287) Cromwell acts like the Pope's view was the end all and be all of the Holocaust; that, had the Pope simply said anything against it Hitler would have stopped.

While the book flows from topic to topic, the writing is choppy. Anyone who is not reading this book for pleasure will find the asides and trivia facts annoying. Mussolini gave the Pope pause, but Cromwell only mentions Mussolini when the Duce had something derogatory to say about the Pope.

Cromwell also indicates the shortcomings of the book. That most of the sources regarding this time in history are still under the 75-year papal secrecy pact. "None that exists," he says of Pius's intimate letters, "is available to scholars." (372) Which is just as well because after reading Cromwell's book it is not clear whether or not he is one.

The book is hard to pin down as to what exactly it is. Is it a biography or a history? With so many secondary sources maybe it could be considered a biohistoriography. For all the arguments that Cromwell puts forth, none seem to be conclusive in damning Pope Pius XII. In fact, reviewing what Cromwell has said, it looks like Pope Pius XII was keeping his friends close and his enemies closer.