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The Vatican and the Custody of Jewish Child Survivors after the Holocaust

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This article focuses on the interaction between Jewish leaders and the Vatican on a highly emotional issue: the post-Holocaust custody of Jewish children rescued by Catholic families or institutions—particularly those cases in which the children had been baptized during the war. The recent discovery of several new documents has occasioned intense controversy and polemics on the subject. Drawing upon hitherto unexamined Jewish sources, the author enters the debate from an entirely new angle: the vantage point of three high-ranking Jewish officials who intervened with the Vatican on this vital matter.

The most recent chapter in the seemingly unending debate over the role of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust concerns the postwar placement of Jewish children whose Catholic rescuers—be they individuals or institutions—had baptized the children in their care.¹ After arguing for more than four decades over larger questions, the two sides in the debate have simply shifted their dispute to this hitherto under-researched issue. However, in historical disputes, new ways of looking at events can raise new questions and deepen our understanding. In this article, I turn to Jewish sources rather than to the incomplete first-hand documentation coming from the Vatican. Specifically, I look at three high-level, desperate Jewish interventions with the Vatican on the question of child custody, none of which has been examined before. The story that emerges does not fit easily with either side in this overheated debate.

Recent Polemics

The latest round of polemics over the Vatican's stance during the Holocaust began in late 2004, when Italian historian Alberto Melloni presented a Church document in the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*. Dated October 23, 1946, the document appeared to communicate the Vatican's intent to retain custody of Jewish children who were being reclaimed by their parents or by Jewish institutions.² According to the Associated Press story, "the 1946 circular apparently instructed French Church authorities that Jewish children baptized as Roman Catholics, for safety or other reasons, should remain within the Church—even if that meant not returning them to their own families once the occupation ended."³ The document's tone "is cold

and impersonal,” observed an article in the *New York Times*, “and it makes no mention of the horrors of the Holocaust.”⁴

Within a few weeks, the story had worked its way into the ongoing polemics on Pius XII—on both sides, it is worth noting. Among Pius’s critics was Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, who published an article in the *Forward* referring to the communication as “ordering a criminal deed.” In his article, which was reprinted in *Le Monde* and elsewhere, Goldhagen proclaimed the Pope “one of the most rampant would-be kidnappers of modern times” and called for an international inquiry.⁵ Adding his own sense of scale, the popular polemicist Rabbi Shmuley Boteach declared that Pius “ordered the mass kidnapping of hundreds of thousands of Jewish children by refusing to hand them back to their rightful Jewish guardians.”⁶ In Rome, Father Peter Gumpel, energetically promoting the cause of Pius XII’s beatification, cast doubt on the document’s authenticity: “There is something fishy here,” he told the *New York Times*. An agitated William Donoghue, president of the American Catholic League, referred to the story as the “Rathergate” of the *New York Times*—an allusion to the CBS anchor who had drawn on false documents in an anti-George Bush commentary.⁷ Despite their insinuation that the document was a forgery, the thrust of the apologists’ argument was that the document had been misattributed and misinterpreted, and that it in fact declared “the very opposite” of what had been contended. Their larger point was that Pius was a great benefactor of the Jews.

In succeeding weeks, the polemics intensified. A Jewish group threatened to sue the Vatican in New York or Washington unless a list of the children was turned over forthwith.⁸ To the benefit of the apologists, a flurry of never-before-published Vatican documents appeared. Putting the *Corriere* memorandum into context, these suggested at the very least a more nuanced interpretation.⁹ In the United States, the Pius-friendly monthly *Inside the Vatican* called the allegations “another anti-papal hoax” and reported that John Paul II, then hospitalized and believed to be near death, had declared “I will not die before I canonize Pope Pius XII.”¹⁰ Sherrie Gossett, an associate editor of the right-leaning organization Accuracy in Media (AIM), took on the *New York Times* over the issue in a bare-knuckled attack, calling the document a “phony memo” and citing Pius-defender William Doino, Jr.’s designation of the affair as “a huge story of journalistic deception.”¹¹

Messages from the Vatican

Before bringing some new material to bear, I will summarize what has been made widely available since this story broke. Despite suggestions that the original *Corriere* document was concocted (law professor and Pius-supporter Ronald J. Rychlak wondered whether Melloni might have committed an “intentional fraud”¹²), there seems to be little doubt about what the document actually is. Written in French, not Italian (as a directive from the Holy See itself likely would

be), it comes from the Paris Nunciature, the Vatican's diplomatic representation in France, then headed by Monsignor Angelo Roncalli—the future Pope John XXIII. A wartime rescuer of Jews from his position as the Vatican's representative in Turkey and Greece, Roncalli later came to be revered by Jews and Catholics alike as the force behind Vatican II's historic move in the early 1960s toward Catholic-Jewish reconciliation. The unsigned document appears to be an instruction from the Vatican's Congregation of the Holy Office, which was in charge of doctrinal matters, on how to deal with the vexed issue of "Jewish children who, during the German occupation, were confided to Catholic institutions and families, and who are now being reclaimed by Jewish institutions."¹³

The document lists five instructions concerning response to demands for custody of the Jewish children: first, nothing should be put into writing—a precaution reflecting the uncertain and disputatious atmosphere surrounding the issue in the autumn of 1946.¹⁴ Second, the initial answer to petitioners should be that the Church must investigate each case separately. Third, "children who were baptized cannot be given to institutions that cannot assure their Christian education." Fourth, "for children who no longer have their parents [*parents*, in French¹⁵], given that the Church has taken care of them, it is not appropriate [*il ne convient pas*] that they be confided to people who have no right to them, at least up to the time when they can decide for themselves." The document adds at this point: "This applies, obviously, to the children who have not been baptized." Fifth, "if the children have been confided [to Catholic institutions or families] by the parents [*parents*] and if the parents claim them now, [then] provided that the children have not received baptism, they can be given back." And the document ends with the crucial phrase: "It is to be noted that this decision of the Holy Congregation has been approved by the Holy Father."

Though some have claimed that this document was a "scoop," in fact it says little that is new to specialists in the subject of the Catholic Church and child custody issues at the end of the war, particularly on the highly sensitive matter of baptism.¹⁶ Quite simply, the issue was a difficult one, so Roncalli asked the Holy See for instructions. And while individual churchmen may have found ways to mitigate the Church's claims when Jewish parents or relatives demanded custody of their baptized children, few would have doubted the seriousness with which guardians of doctrinal orthodoxy regarded these claims. In her 2001 book on the rescue of Jewish children by the French Catholic sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion (Our Lady of Zion), Madeleine Compte points out that the Congregation of the Holy Office was "categorical" on the subject: "In the case of baptized children, the Church was responsible for them and had to avoid giving them up to Jewish institutions, [and] even to Jewish families in which their Christian education could not be assured."¹⁷

What we can say, on the basis of investigative work by several Italian researchers, is that the *Corriere* document was itself a summary of a Vatican communication of a month earlier. A copy of the communication was attached to the document in the version deposited in the French episcopal archives. In the earlier document, the papal aide Domenico Tardini advised Roncalli of the Congregation's views on how to respond to Chief Rabbi of Palestine Isaac Herzog's appeals to Church authorities on the issue of the custody of Jewish children in Catholic hands.¹⁸ "The Eminent Fathers decided that, if possible, there should be no response to the Grand Rabbi of Palestine," Tardini wrote. This reply suggests that notwithstanding the rabbi's meeting with the Pope on the matter the previous March, this issue remained a thorny one for the Church. In his message, Tardini expressed reservations similar to those voiced in the *Corriere* letter about returning baptized Jewish children. But he clarified that requests from Jewish *institutions*, not those from Jewish parents or relatives, were at issue here.¹⁹

Angelo Roncalli, the head of the Paris Nunciature and the recipient of Tardini's message on the Jewish children, is one of the least understood figures in this story. Sent to Paris in 1945 by Pius XII to replace the former Nuncio, Valerio Valeri, whom de Gaulle deemed tainted due to his proximity to the Vichy regime, Roncalli had shown great sympathy to the Jewish cause during the war. He had intervened personally on behalf of Jewish refugees from Italy, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary. He had met with Rabbi Isaac Herzog, then Chief Rabbi of Palestine, and passed along Herzog's appeals to the Vatican to assist in rescue efforts.²⁰

While there has been some speculation about Roncalli's role in this affair, there is little information about how the Nunciature handled the issue of child custody, how the nuncio himself felt about the matter, and whether he approved of Tardini's instructions. Father Jean Dujardin, an authority on Roncalli, notes that his approach to Jewish issues was radically different from that prevailing in Rome; it is therefore possible, Dujardin conjectures, that the nuncio did not pass along the guidelines.²¹ Following the Jesuit historian Giovanni Sale, journalist Gianni Valente suggests that Roncalli's approach was deliberately vague, involving "a kind of studied reticence that, while it avoided entering into clear contradiction with canonical norms and doctrines about the obligations that bind the Church with regard to the baptized, opened the way for concrete solutions that took into account the anomalous situation in which those baptisms were administered."²² But there is no documentary evidence. Etienne Fouilloux, a French specialist on Roncalli and the editor of the future pope's recently published journal for the period in question, has provided no answers.²³ Fouilloux told the French Catholic newspaper *La Croix* that he "found nothing on this question in [Roncalli's] journal."²⁴ For the moment, we simply cannot know.

Anxiety over Child Survivors

For Jewish observers, there was no issue more dismaying in the wake of the Holocaust than the fate of child survivors. From the very earliest moments of liberation, the urgent challenge for everyone involved in relief efforts was the desperate, ghastly condition in which so many Jewish children were found.²⁵ Poignant, alarming messages reached Allied countries. In the United States, Myriam Kubowitzki, the wife of Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) Leon Kubowitzki and an early campaigner on the WJC's behalf, described a horrendous spectacle. "On all the highways and roads of Europe there are Jewish children," she told benefactors; "Today, four weeks after the unconditional surrender of Germany [they] dare to come out of the woods and the mountains. They are covered with rags, hungry, and accustomed to beg for food. . . . There are children without parents by the tens of thousands all over Europe."²⁶ For months, attempts to assess and contend with the broad picture were subverted by sometimes desperate local conditions. From Germany, correspondents reported that thousands of children had been discovered in camps, some of them barely alive. "Boys of 13 and 14 were emaciated and stunted to the size of children half their ages," said one report; "in their faces were the pain and agony of decades."²⁷ From Belgium in September 1945, Leon Kubowitzki telegraphed Arieh Tartakower, one of his associates in New York:

CHILDREN SITUATION MOST DISTRESSING STOP. . . VISITED SEVERAL JEWISH HOMES APPALLING LACK CLOTHING SHOES STOP WOUNDED FEET REQUIRE CONSTANT DRESSING STOP KNIVES FORKS SPOONS RUSTEATEN STOP VIEW BELGIAN CLIMATE NECESSARY DISPATCH CLOTHING SHOES BY AIR ALSO NEEDED DENTAL AMBULANCE STOP GODPARENTS PROJECT PARCELS LETTERS MEETS ENTHUSIASTIC APPROVAL AS PSYCHOTHERAPY MOST CHILDREN BEING WITHOUT ANY RELATIVE FRIEND STOP.²⁸

At a press conference in September 1945, Gerhart Riegner, the representative of the WJC in Geneva, ventured some appalling numbers: "Out of a total population of 3,300,000 Jews, only 5,000 Jewish children have been left in Poland. Out of the 100,000 Jewish children living before the war in the Hungarian provinces, Budapest excepted, only fifty have returned up to the end of August. In the city of Brno [Brünn], where there was a Jewish population of 12,000 people before the war, there are now only eighteen children left under seven years." Riegner estimated that there were between 200,000 and 300,000 Jewish child survivors in Europe, of whom 75,000 were orphans and many were still in German camps.²⁹ But the numbers changed constantly, as new children appeared, and others found temporary shelter.

Jewish relief workers were swamped and their anxieties ran high. Understandably, given the slaughter that had occurred, they linked the fate of

these innocents to the question of Jewish survival. “We have become very poor in Jewish children and therefore the value of every Jewish child has grown manifold for us,” declared a WJC position paper in 1945.³⁰ Myriam Kubowitzki told her audiences, “Our people lost too much in this war, and children, for every people, represent the most precious treasure.” With an uncertain grasp of details and heedless of individual concerns, she then touched on the sorest point (which was to be repeated often in the weeks and months of emergency relief work ahead): Jewish children were in Catholic hands. Of the tens of thousands of children, she noted, “some are in Catholic convents. We have to take them out of this environment as soon as possible, even if they have no food and clothes.”³¹ From Geneva, Riegner raised the issue with Nahum Goldmann, the president of the WJC: “There are many thousands of Jewish children who were hidden in convents, in Christian families, schools, etc. Many of these children have already been adopted by non-Jews and will thus definitively be lost for Jewry unless immediate action is taken.”³² It seems that there was a special anxiety here about Jewish children in the hands of the Church. The fear of Jewish children being taken by their Christian neighbors was deeply rooted in Jewish folklore and flourished in a blood-stained postwar environment; the terrible realities of the Nazi years had outstripped the Jews’ worst nightmares.

But there was an element of reality as well: the reason why there were postwar custody issues is that, during the war, Catholic families and institutions across the continent had rescued Jewish children.³³ No one knows how many were saved in this way, and the circumstances differed radically. Some rescuers took in the children at great personal risk, acting on their own initiative and refusing to accede to German demands. Other Catholic rescuers acted out of less admirable motives and/or in ignorance of the children’s true identities. In some cases the children were confided to Catholic institutions by their parents, while in others they were left on their own when their parents were suddenly rounded up by the Germans; these children found their way by various paths to Catholic institutions or individual rescuers. Some children were baptized during the war, but most simply assumed Catholic identities—either with the help of their rescuers or without their knowledge. Nearly always, true identities had to be carefully hidden, and therefore few if any records were kept. In the end, the key to the story in almost every instance is intensely local. City and town authorities and individual families were spurred by particular circumstances and their own motivations—some noble and some not—and made their own decisions about whom to rescue and how long to care for them.

Baptism was part of this highly variegated picture. The history of baptism and conversion during the Holocaust remains to be written—if it ever can be written, given the great variety of priests’ understandings of their obligations at the time, the secrecy in which baptisms often were performed, the forging of

documents, and the life-and-death circumstances that differed so widely.³⁴ Baptism could be an element of a life-saving Catholic identity, but there were complications. For Jews, baptism could lead to a more secure integration into the non-Jewish world; at the same time, it certified implicitly that the baptized person had not been born Catholic, and so could increase risk. Some Jewish parents, desperately wanting to save their children by placing them in Catholic hands, actively sought baptism for them. But openly administered wartime baptism was out of the question.

In some circumstances, Comte has found, priests baptized Jewish children as part of their proselytizing mission; in others, they jealously guarded the sacrament, unwilling to dispense it for this-worldly reasons—or without the permission of the children's parents.³⁵ And not only did Catholic motivations differ; so, too, did the parents' understanding of what precisely had transpired with respect to their children. Sometimes they understood acceptance by the Church as part of a lifesaving gesture, but at other times they viewed baptism as a cruel form of clerical opportunism.

Whatever these realities, however, in the desperate situation of spring and summer 1945 the idea of Jewish children in Catholic custody stoked the fears and imaginations of a vulnerable and wounded people. In Italy, the Hebrew-language newspaper *Lahayal*, which served British army units from Palestine, reported rumors of “wholesale conversions” and appealed urgently to Jewish authorities to mobilize against the danger. “To date we know of 200 Jewish children and youths in monasteries, but their number is far larger,” the article stated. “The monks and nuns of the Catholic Church have done much in rescuing Jews, but they do not stop at physical rescue and seek to rescue the soul as well, into the Church community.” For many, baptism represented a threat to Jewish continuity. As one WJC observer in London noted, “The first phase of the tragedy of contemporary [Jewry]—the physical destruction of millions of Jews—is nearing its end, and already the second phase is setting in—the phase of destruction through baptism.”³⁶

How many Jewish children were being claimed after the war by Jewish families or institutions, and how many of these children were in Catholic hands? In the confusion and rapidly changing circumstances of postwar Europe it was impossible to answer these questions. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict Jewish authorities had only the vaguest sense of the number of victims, let alone of those who had survived. In the summer of 1945 the Institute of Jewish Affairs in New York, a highly professional research unit under the direction of Dr. Jacob Robinson, was advancing an estimate of 5.7 to 6 million Jewish deaths during the Holocaust. Among these were perhaps one million Jewish children,³⁷ although some Jewish leaders at the time had difficulty coming to terms with such a figure. Surveying the wreckage of Jewish life on the Continent, relief workers focused on

survivors, particularly the youngest and most vulnerable. Jewish organizations scrambled to assess survivors' needs in each country as it was liberated. Immediately after the end of the hostilities, communication between New York, London, and continental Europe often involved frantic appeals for information: How many children? Where? What did they need? But because the situation changed rapidly and lines of authority were confused, information was difficult to obtain. Over the course of several months, American Jewish organizations sent fact-finding missions and dispatched aid; local Jewish organizations were mobilized and began to take charge.

France was one of the main centers of attention, with the greatest number of child survivors in Europe—due to the substantial size of the prewar Jewish population (330,000) and the high rate of survival there in contrast to other countries, significant Jewish and non-Jewish rescue efforts, and the fact that France had been liberated almost a year before other occupied countries. There were approximately 30,000 Jewish children in the country after the war, according to a WJC report released in the autumn of 1946.³⁸ A year after the beginning of the liberation, in June 1945, the principal children's relief organization in France, the *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE), reported that 1,200 Jewish children remained in non-Jewish families or institutions in that country. Putting the matter into perspective, OSE reported that only about fifty of these were in danger of being converted, as opposed to some 10,500 who had been threatened with extermination but had been rescued.³⁹

Problems persisted in France, however, and obstacles to the return of Jewish children to family members or Jewish institutions remained. According to journalist Andrea Tornielli, there were probably more secret baptisms in France than in any other country.⁴⁰ Although a WJC report issued at the end of 1945 described the progress of the return of Jewish children as “on the whole, satisfactory,” local Jewish authorities knew that it was by no means perfect. Some Jewish children remained in Catholic hands. The sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion, who had rescued some 450 Jewish children, maintained custody of thirty as late as January 1946. In July 1945, the *Conseil supérieur de l'enfance juive*, a federation of Jewish welfare organizations under the auspices of the Jewish Consistory that dealt with children, appealed to the papal nuncio for help. Apparently, they received no response.⁴¹ The Catholic Church in France took no official position on the question of transferring custody of Jewish children, and as French researcher Katy Hazan reports, it “built a wall of silence against inquiries as to the real number of Jewish children living in Catholic institutions.”⁴² According to another WJC report, assistance from the Vatican on this matter, while promised, had never materialized.⁴³

Three Jewish Interventions

Given the priority that Jewish leaders placed on the question of Jewish child survivors, particularly those in the custody of Catholic families or institutions, it makes sense to turn to Jewish sources to shed light on the still obscure question of the Vatican's role in this matter. The remainder of this paper examines such evidence, focusing on three direct Jewish appeals to the Vatican—by Leon Kubowitzki, Gerhart Riegner, and Rabbi Isaac Herzog. To my knowledge these were the highest-level such interventions in 1945 and 1946 concerning the status of Jewish children.⁴⁴

Leon Kubowitzki

As we have seen, Kubowitzki observed firsthand the dreadful conditions in which Jewish survivors found themselves in Europe immediately after the end of hostilities with Germany. An attorney and a committed Zionist, Kubowitzki was no stranger to high-level negotiations on behalf of Jews. Lithuanian-born but having spent much of his career in Belgium, he was based in New York as Secretary General of the WJC. During the war he served as a member of the Congress Executive Committee, heading its Department for European Jewish Affairs. Deeply involved in rescue matters, he took charge of these initiatives in 1944 after they were centralized in one department.⁴⁵ An acquaintance of philosopher Jacques Maritain and other senior Catholic personalities, Kubowitzki had significant experience in approaching the Vatican on Jewish issues. Through the Italian Jewish leader Raffaele Cantoni, whom he met in London in the summer of 1945, Kubowitzki made his first effort to meet with Pius XII to request that he issue a papal denunciation of antisemitism and a statement on the return of Jewish children in Catholic custody.

Kubowitzki arrived in Rome on September 18. Two days later he learned from Franklin C. Gowen, a State Department official and assistant to Franklin Roosevelt's personal representative to the pope, Myron Taylor, that he was to see Pacelli on the following day (the 21st). "I must confess that I was flushed with a multitude of emotions when I held in my hands the printed form," Kubowitzki wrote in his diary.⁴⁶ The declared purpose of the meeting—advanced perhaps in order to secure the audience with Pacelli—was for Kubowitzki to convey to the Vatican the thanks of the Italian Union of Jewish Communities for aid it had extended to Italian Jewry during the war, and to deliver a gift of gratitude in the form of a check for two million lire.⁴⁷

Some details of the visit convey the flavor of the encounter between the pope and the senior Jewish official. Accompanied by Cantoni and with time to spare before the papal audience, Kubowitzki toured St. Peter's Square and the Basilica. The petitioners were deeply impressed. "What did they do to deserve to be given so much beauty, so much splendor?" Kubowitzki asked Cantoni. "We

returned to the papal residence and were received, with great marks of respect, first by the elevator servants and then by a number of ushers and priests dressed either in uniform or in robes of various colours. We went through a succession of anterooms, in one of which my invitation was taken from me—to my great regret—and Cantoni remained waiting. In a last antechamber I was greeted by a dignitary in a red robe, a cardinal I suppose, who engaged me in a lively but quite boring conversation, on my origin, on my organization, and so on.”

Finally it was time for the interview itself. Gowen joined Kubowitzki for the meeting, but remained in the background—literally so, sitting in a chair behind Kubowitzki throughout.⁴⁸ The two visitors awaited the call to enter. Self-importantly, perhaps, Gowen mentioned that he had been consulted twice on the encounter. And then: “Suddenly there was a commotion. [Papal aide Giovanni Battista] Monsignore [*sic*] Montini appeared in the door of the Papal working room and made a gesture. The man in the red robe took the lead and kneeled, and so did Gowen. The priest⁴⁹ left, and Gowen kissed the Pope’s ring. Pius XII held out his hand to me, which I took while bowing deeply.” Speaking in imperfect English, the pope then said that “he was very pleased that I had come, that he knew of the sufferings of my people and had followed their fate with great love.” Kubowitzki then observed that the pope *looked just like his uncle Morris*: “He had extraordinarily luminous eyes and a smile of great goodness on his face,” he went on, in a passage left out of his sterner and slightly less positive 1967 version of the meeting.

The extract below contains the highlights of Kubowitzki’s private recollection of his conversation with the pontiff, written the same day:⁵⁰

K. I am very grateful to your Holiness for the honour granted to me in receiving me after a request on such short notice. My organization has requested me not to fail, while being in Rome, to express to Your Holiness the gratitude of our communities throughout the world for what the Church has been trying to do, and has done, for our persecuted people. . . . We have suffered great losses. We have had almost six million civilian victims. . . . We have no statistics about the children who were killed, but we think at least a half a million.⁵¹ [Kubowitzki then asks whether the pope could issue a statement denouncing antisemitism, following the example of Pius XI.]

P. You mean a statement? We will consider it, certainly, most favourably, with all our love; we will consider it.

K. The Church has saved many of our children. They are a few, very few in comparison with the numbers who were killed. [But] they are numerous in our eyes. We would like them to be returned to the Jewish community. *I am not speaking of those who have been baptized with the agreement of their parents. I have in mind the others.*⁵²

P. (He is visibly surprised): But are there many?⁵³

K. They have been returned to us in most cases. . . . But we have met with difficulties in some cases in France, Belgium, Holland. We feel the Jewish community has duties towards these children which it alone can discharge, now that their parents are no longer among the living. Those children are broken souls. We think we are the only ones who can give them the psychological climate they need to be restored to normal health, to a normal conception of life.

P. Could we have a memorandum on this matter? Also some statistics. We would like to study the question. We will give it all our attention.

K. It will be a privilege for me to submit to Your Holiness such a memorandum. I thank Your Holiness.

P. Where is your family, how is it doing?

K. In America and Belgium. I am very grateful to Your Holiness. (I rose to take leave.)

P. I am glad I have seen you. God bless you.

At that point the meeting ended. Kubowitzki's notes continue:

Gowen rose and said in Italian to the pope: "Shall I leave"? The pope answered something which could be: "Why? There is nothing to be added." He held out his hand, which I took. Gowen kneeled and kissed the pope's ring. We left.

Gowen (behind me, first in a whisper, evidently moved): "Excellent. You have done an excellent job. Clever and to the point. I am very glad. This was an audience as is only granted to a King."

During our conversation Pius XII was following my words with keen interest, frequently repeating them, his face marked by much affection. He smiled broadly as we shook hands when parting [but when I looked again I had the impression that there was a note of triumph or irony in his smile, but I may be mistaken].

The fragment within the square brackets is carefully stricken out, but the original text can be made out upon careful inspection.

Kubowitzki seems to have been star-struck in the pope's presence, but with perhaps a measure of skepticism in the mix as well. Remarkable to modern readers expecting disagreement are the cordiality of the meeting and the Jewish representative's ingratiating tone—both reflections of a different time and place. Of special note, of course, is Kubowitzki's apparent concession that in requesting that the children be returned, he was "not speaking of those who have been baptized with the agreement of their parents." These would include, presumably, children whose baptism had occurred in circumstances of the gravest peril to their lives and who had then become orphans.⁵⁴

As we have seen, Kubowitzki agreed to send Pacelli a report on the children in Catholic custody. I have been unable to discover such a document, and I believe that none was ever written. A passage in Kubowitzki's article on this

subject, written many years later, explains what happened. “I had promised the Pope a memorandum on the question of the children,” he wrote. He continued:

Ever since I left New York at the end of December 1944 for my first visit in liberated Europe and during my following trips I received many complaints about Jewish children kept in monasteries without anyone coming to their rescue. Now I started sending cables to all those who had submitted complaints of this kind asking for names, addresses and particulars. Had I been over zealous in my statements to the Pope? Or had the children been returned in the meantime? At any rate, except in a few isolated and rather complex cases, the complaints all referred to individuals who had become attached to a particular child placed with them and refused to hand it back. This material provided no basis for a memorandum to the Pope, and the children were recovered by other means.⁵⁵

Although Kubowitzki does not say so definitively, it appears that his interview was the last communication he had with the Vatican on the matter.

Gerhart Riegner

The second direct Jewish intervention on behalf of children in Catholic custody was made by Gerhart Riegner, director of the WJC’s Geneva office and a tireless advocate throughout the Holocaust of the cause of the Jewish people in Nazi-occupied Europe. Trained as a lawyer, Riegner followed Vatican matters closely and had appealed to the Holy See for aid to the Jews during the war through the offices of Archbishop Filippo Bernardini, the papal nuncio in Bern.⁵⁶ In Rome at the end of 1945 on Jewish refugee matters, Riegner sought out Montini, one of Pacelli’s closest associates and the future Pope Paul VI. As we have seen, Riegner—himself of German Jewish background—shared the common Jewish anxiety about the fate of Jewish child survivors. “The problem . . . preoccupied us enormously,” Riegner wrote in his memoirs; “We were driven to despair [*nous étions désespérés*] by the enormous loss of Jewish children during the course of the Shoah.” Riegner considered it a “sacred duty” to seek out those who had been hidden.⁵⁷

Prompted by Kubowitzki, Riegner met with Montini in November 1945 to ask for help in recovering Jewish children in Catholic custody. It was “one of the most dramatic and unhappy meetings I have had in my life,” he wrote later. Riegner told Montini: “We, the Jewish people, have lost a million and a half children. We are very grateful to Catholic institutions and to the Catholic faithful for all that they have done to rescue the Jewish children and to help them to survive. But we think that, the danger having passed, they must be returned to us. As we don’t know where they are, we are asking you to help us find them.” Thereupon, according to Riegner, there ensued a painful discussion about the numbers. Montini simply could not believe Riegner’s estimation of Jewish losses, believing them to be exaggerated. Riegner went through the numbers, country by country,

trying to persuade the priest otherwise. “It isn’t possible,” Montini insisted, adding that “they probably emigrated.”

Finally, after about twenty minutes of apparently heated argument, Riegner broke through: “I think that it was only at that moment that he grasped, for the first time, the extent of our catastrophe.” Riegner went on: “I remember that he seemed much moved. But that does not mean that he was prepared to help us. He told me, in effect: ‘Let me know where to find the children and I will help you get them back.’ I responded, more or less, ‘If I knew, I wouldn’t need your help.’” Riegner wrote at the conclusion of this section: “I have no doubt about Montini’s good faith. But the reaction means that during the whole of the war neither he nor the upper reaches of the Catholic Church understood what had happened. Even after the war, ignorance of the scope of the tragedy persisted. That’s the plain truth of the matter [*c’est une constatation*].”⁵⁸

Riegner’s discussion ends at this point. To my knowledge, he did not take up the issue of Jewish children again at the level of Catholic leadership until 1953, during the so-called “Finaly Affair” in France (see below).⁵⁹

Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog

The third appeal on behalf of the Jewish children was made in March 1946 by Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog, who was at that time the Jerusalem-based Chief Rabbi of Palestine. Heavily bearded and garbed in the traditional dress of Eastern European Orthodox Jews, the Polish-born Herzog was an outstanding Talmudic scholar and an imposing personality, renowned for his own learning as well as for his descent from famous rabbis and scholars. Brilliant and erudite, he had immigrated to Palestine in 1936 following a remarkable career: educated at the Sorbonne and the University of London, he served as Rabbi of Belfast, then Rabbi of Dublin, then as Chief Rabbi of Ireland. In the latter post he was closely associated with both Eamon de Valera, the champion of Irish independence and eventual Irish president, and Cardinal Joseph MacRory, archbishop of Armagh and primate of Ireland. Throughout the war, Herzog appealed ceaselessly for assistance to Jews. He worked closely with Angelo Roncalli in Istanbul on behalf of the Jews of Transnistria and sought to use Roncalli’s good offices to relay messages to the Vatican. In 1944 he took up the cause of the Jews of Hungary, though he did not succeed in his effort to meet the pope; apparently the Vatican feared that such an encounter would provide grist for German propaganda about the Vatican being under Jewish influence.⁶⁰

Immediately after the war, Herzog toured Europe for six months with his son Yaacov as his aide and secretary. His tour began with a visit to the Vatican, where he hoped to persuade the pope to provide assistance to Jewish survivors and, in particular, to support the return of Jewish children.⁶¹ Herzog saw Pacelli on Sunday, March 10—an exceptional scheduling given the Vatican’s general

practice of refraining from doing business on Sundays. It seems that Herzog was accorded this honor in recognition of the urgency of his case.⁶² The meeting was private and continued for close to an hour. The men spoke in three languages: English, French, and Latin. According to Herzog's version, the conversation began with what must have been an unprecedented moment of high-level Jewish-Catholic hermeneutics based upon Pacelli's citation of the Lord's promise ("I will give you a new heart") from the book of Ezekiel in a recent public address. Herzog told the pope that in the biblical passage, the phrase concerning the offering of "a new heart" used the Hebrew letter *lamed* to signify that a new heart was not simply handed over, but was given "in the way that one gives a present to a friend . . . out of sympathy and goodwill on the receiver's part."⁶³ There is no record of whether Pacelli agreed or added his own learned interpretation.



Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine Isaac Herzog (right) leaving the private office of Pope Pius XII after a March 10, 1946 audience. Herzog is accompanied by his son, Yaacov (center), in British Army uniform. USHMM, courtesy of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis.

Having taken each other's measure, the two men got down to business. According to a pamphlet issued by the trip's rabbinical organizers, Herzog outlined the catastrophic impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish people, who had suffered "the torments of humanity."⁶⁴ The rabbi then "called upon [the pope] to repent for the sins of Christianity towards the people of Israel throughout the generations by getting to the heart of the Jewish problem."⁶⁵ Referring to Jewish orphans still

in Catholic hands, Herzog expressed heartfelt thanks for their rescue on behalf of the “nation of Israel.” But he noted that Jews could not reconcile themselves to the possibility of the young ones remaining “cut off completely from their origins.” He explained: “As of today every child for us signifies one thousand children . . . while for the Christian church, which has millions of believers, such numbers are petty in comparison.” He sought the pope’s help for the children’s return, and in particular sought a papal appeal to all priests to reveal the presence and whereabouts of Jewish children in Catholic custody. Herzog then went on to describe the terrible conditions prevailing in post-Holocaust Poland, including the continuing presence of antisemitism and the despondency of that country’s remnant Jewish community.

According to this account, Pacelli “was moved upon hearing of the enormity of the Jewish people’s disaster,” and expressed both his astonishment at the persistence of antisemitism and “his deeply-felt participation in the sorrows of [the Jewish] people.” The pope requested from Herzog a “detailed memorandum” on the subject of the children, and “promised to deliberate with the gravity appropriate to such matters.”⁶⁶ Herzog seems to have felt that Pacelli was being overly careful: “I asked him to issue a decree [on the matter] but he hesitated to give this to me. They say he is a diplomat. In this regard, it was once said of a certain rabbi that he was clever and I said: ‘a rabbi should not be clever, he should be wise.’ The pope is clever; he promised to help me if I ran into difficulties.”⁶⁷

Two days later, Herzog reappeared at the Vatican accompanied by Rabbi David Prato, the recently named Chief Rabbi of Rome. The purpose of this meeting was to deliver the “memorandum” and to hold additional discussions with the Vatican’s secretariat. This document, with its effusive expression of gratitude to the Holy See and to Pius personally, has been cited often in the polemics associated with the question of the Jewish children, and more generally to support the view of Pius XII as a rescuer of Jews during the Holocaust.⁶⁸ “In accordance with the wish expressed by you at the conclusion of the audience which you graciously granted to me,” Herzog began, the memorandum was to serve as a “petition on behalf of the entire people of Israel.” Then followed the thanks: “The Jewish people will remember eternally with profound gratitude the help rendered to so many of its suffering brethren during the Nazi persecution by the Holy See generally and by tens of Catholic bishops and priests throughout Europe.” Herzog went on to appeal again for papal assistance in seeing that “these children be all restored to our people”; that they be “returned to the rock from which they were hewn.”

As with both Kubowitzki and Riegner, the Vatican requested details, and in this as in the other two cases, the petitioner was hard-pressed to provide them. The best that Herzog could do was to refer in his communication of March 12 to “great numbers” of children that “have yet to come back.” He wrote that “it is



Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine Isaac Herzog (center) discusses the problems of displaced European Jews with Chief Rabbi of Rome David Prato (left) and Arthur Greenleigh of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (1946). USHMM, courtesy of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

estimated that at least three thousand Jewish children [in Poland] are still in Catholic monasteries and even private homes of Catholics.” Herzog’s main effort, like that of the two preceding Jewish intercessors, was to obtain a favorable hearing for a recovery effort that had yet to be planned and organized; hence the urgency conveyed in the letter, but also the lack of specificity. Notably, the memorandum does not contain a request for a papal communication to the entire Church on the matter.

According to the account published in 1947, Herzog was again told, on his second visit, that the Vatican would consider the request for a general papal instruction. The pope had promised Herzog that if, in his forthcoming travels, the rabbi learned of Jewish children in Catholic institutions and had difficulty in removing them, he could request the Vatican’s intervention. “However, a condition was given,” the report went on, “that the rabbi himself would investigate the incidents. . . . This gave [Herzog] the permission to refer to the pope’s words in his encounter with members of the faith. It should be noted in sorrow that the request for the publication of a letter to the leaders of the churches was never granted.”

Immediately following this visit with the pope, Rabbi Herzog set out on his tour of the shattered Jewish communities. In his efforts to persuade Catholic

authorities to assist him in recovering Jewish children, he occasionally invoked the pope's supportive statements. "Father and son's journey in 1946 through devastated Europe searching for remnants of perished Jewry was a frightening experience," writes Yaacov's biographer, Michael Bar-Zohar.⁶⁹ According to Yaacov, the mission resulted in the rescue of 1,000 children—thanks to his and his father's own efforts and to the assistance of many high officials, including heads of government and senior cabinet ministers. This is where our account returns to the documents mentioned at the beginning of this paper, and the controversy that they continue to generate.

Herzog's first stop was Paris, where he met with his old friend Roncalli, now the papal nuncio to France. "He was really glad to see me," the rabbi reported; "he almost said the *Shehechyanu* [a Jewish prayer of thanksgiving] and then hugged me in joy. I told him everything and he promised to help." But even Roncalli had to act cautiously, according to Herzog: "He is afraid to go out in the open currently with this matter but will make a diplomatic action through which he promised me that he would convene [the French episcopacy] and demand that they each act on the matter in their own regions."⁷⁰ Apparently, Roncalli then collected views on the matter from his episcopal colleagues, and in late August asked the Vatican's Secretariat of State how to respond.⁷¹ Tardini's reply to Roncalli of September 1946, following a consultation with the Holy Office for a theological reading of what to do about baptized Jewish children, contained the requested instructions. This letter was the basis for the originally published draft memorandum for French bishops. Tardini began, it will be recalled, by noting that "the Eminent Fathers decided that if possible there should be no response to the Grand Rabbi of Palestine."

Conclusions

Tardini's unhelpful words from Rome were, happily, neither the whole nor the end of the story. My own sense is that the encounter between Catholics and Jews concerning Jewish children in the aftermath of the Holocaust was one small element that helped define the relationship between the two groups in a period of transition between the sometimes unsatisfactory meetings during the Second World War and the vast improvements of the Second Vatican Council fifteen years later. And no doubt the Holocaust, even when it was not mentioned explicitly, was at the center of this change. "After the hurricane of the war," Gianni Valente writes, "and in the face of the . . . uncontrollable jumble of feelings, of pain, of wounded affections, of exasperated identity crises that marked the aftermath of the war," the high churchmen and the Jews discussed here struggled to define their priorities in their relationship to one another.⁷² None of the personalities involved in the discussions of children was fully in command of the facts, or capable of reaching across a religious and cultural divide that had existed for centuries. A closer examination of

this issue, however, suggests that there were efforts on both sides to bridge the gap. The postwar issue of Jewish children reveals, in the end, not two unresponsive or intransigent communities, but some goodwill, continued misunderstanding, and certain interests still tragically at odds with each other.

For the Jews, the question of the children was simply desperate, dominating their concerns for their gravely wounded people. "What destruction, what solitude, what desolation!" wrote Yaacov Herzog of his journey with his father in 1946. Coming to terms with this, he continued, "could overturn the accepted scale of human values, and a man can only avoid plunging into the abyss of total despair by holding on to the eternal Rock in whose shadow we have made our journey through history."⁷³ Although better informed than almost any of their Jewish counterparts, none of the three Jewish leaders discussed here had a firm grasp of the situation of child survivors. None of them knew how many there were, where they were located, how many were in Catholic hands, how many had been baptized, and what kind of obstacles had to be cleared away to bring about their return to the Jewish people. In the aftermath of the greatest Jewish catastrophe that any of them could imagine, it was all they could do to sound a cry of alarm about the recurring Jewish nightmare that Christians would take their children away. All three petitioners viewed the Vatican and Church decision-makers with suspicion, but also with a measure of hope. Neither Riegner nor Herzog even raised the issue of baptism, which they must surely have known was highly sensitive for the Church. Kubowitzki did do so, as we have seen, but only to deny Jewish claims over those children who had been baptized "with the agreement of their parents." All three, we should note, believed that their Catholic counterparts were acting in good faith. However, they seem also to have believed that the Church failed to grasp the scope the Jewish tragedy and needed to be prodded to do something about it.

The appeals of the Jewish petitioners appear to have awakened some sympathy within the Vatican. That sympathy came belatedly, to be sure, in the case of Montini, who despite all that he had seen and heard in the preceding years, seems to have required the forceful confrontation with Riegner finally to acknowledge that there had been a holocaust. Even so, the fact that Vatican representatives evinced sympathy and good faith did not mean that the Church was prepared to act as the Jews hoped it would. The Vatican had real reservations both about the return of baptized Jewish children and about custody claims being advanced on behalf of Jewish institutions. The documents suggest that if the two issues had come together in specific instances, the Church might have dug in its heels.

With respect to the issue of baptism, the instructions from the Holy Office relayed by Tardini did not differ appreciably from those presented in the draft circular to the French bishops: the Church would examine the circumstances on a case-by-case basis on the principle that validly baptized children were supposed to

receive a Christian education. It would be “another matter” if the parents had survived—although it was left unsaid precisely how this other matter would be settled, and for that matter whether what was meant was *parents* or *relatives*. The Church made no effort—certainly no public effort—to allay this widespread Jewish fear.

Custody claims by Jewish institutions were the source of the reservations outlined in Tardini’s memorandum. The Vatican was not alone in failing to appreciate fully that the claims were being made as a national imperative. Moreover, the declared intent of some of these institutions was to take the children to Palestine, which was widely considered a dangerous proposition at the time, and was certainly inimical to the Vatican’s own perceived interests in the region. Notwithstanding the desperate appeals from Jewish organizations, therefore, the Vatican was cautious: each case should be examined on its own merits. The Holy Office had to review the question theologically, and in the end the children could not be given to institutions that had “no right to them”—whatever that meant. And of course, nothing was to be put into writing. No concessions were to be made on paper to this wounded people.

As during the Holocaust itself, Church officials were extremely reluctant to direct local Catholic institutions on matters having to do with Jews. Tardini’s message to the French Church, it has been pointed out, left wide areas open to local interpretation. But a broad appeal to local churches to assist Jewish aid workers looking for Jewish children was apparently out of the question. To the Vatican, which was deeply conservative on matters of its own authority to say the least, the Jewish visitors’ request that the pope issue an instruction on such a matter to the entire Catholic Church must have seemed outlandish. No Church leader discussed here—not even Roncalli—was willing to step outside his traditionally prescribed sphere of authority to urge the faithful to help assuage the continuing effects of the Jewish tragedy. Catholic officials knew well that many clerics and laypeople were unsympathetic to the Jewish cause, and so they were reluctant to define a bold, new relationship with Jewish religious authority or “the Jewish people.” The result was that all three petitioners were treated courteously, but seem also to have felt that their appeals were not fully or enthusiastically answered.

In practical terms, the public discussion of the return of the Jewish children after the war died down in most countries after a few years. Notably, it flared up in France in the early 1950s with the Finaly Affair, a case involving two orphaned Jewish brothers. In that case, baptism figured for a time as an argument for keeping the children in Catholic hands.⁷⁴ In the end, the Church did not insist and the children were returned to their family. Apart from the Finaly brothers, there were few, if any, conflicts over the custody of baptized Jewish children in France, leading Nazi-hunter and historian Serge Klarsfeld to claim that the entire issue of these children was something of a “tempest in a teapot.”⁷⁵

During 1945 and 1946, many Jewish children in Catholic hands were turned over freely to Jewish institutions. Some, of course, were not—but as far as I can tell the decisions taken there were local and the issues turned on specific circumstances. We have seen that Kubowitzki came to believe that Jewish authorities had no continuing issue with the Catholic hierarchy over the question. Rabbi Herzog may well have been rebuffed when he sought to define limiting cases in France; but on his European journey in 1946 he referred to the pope's support for the children, and this probably did some good.⁷⁶ There was no campaign at the very highest levels of the Catholic Church to “kidnap” Jewish children in 1945 and 1946. But neither was there a clear call from that quarter to come to terms with the suffering Jewish people. A breakthrough would come in the mid-1960s with the Second Vatican Council. The discussions described here were a step along that path.

Notes

1. For assistance with Israeli archival sources, my thanks go to Ohad Abrahami, Shulamit Eliash, Dan Heller, Shira Herzog, and especially Sara Palmor. For their comments on an earlier draft of this paper I am also grateful to John Conway and Fr. Gerald P. Fogarty, as well as to the anonymous reviewers for *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.
2. “Pio XII a Roncalli: Non restituite i bimbi ebrei,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 28, 2004.
3. Angela Doland, “1946 Letter: Church Should Keep Baptized Kids of Jews,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 2, 2005.
4. Elaine Sciolino and Jason Horowitz, “Shelter for Jewish Children in Wartime, but at What Cost?” *New York Times*, January 9, 2005. The *Times* quoted Melloni as saying that the document “shows the very bureaucratic and very icy attitude of the Catholic Church in these types of things.” For an early French evaluation see also Henri Tincq, “En 1946, le Vatican a demandé de ne pas rendre à leurs familles les enfants juifs baptisés,” *Le Monde*, January 11, 2005.
5. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, “If This Is a Saint . . .” *The Forward*, January 7, 2005; idem, “Questions for the Vatican: Hide and Seek,” *The New Republic*, January 31, 2005; and idem, “Non, Pie XII n’était pas un saint,” *Le Monde*, January 15, 2005.
6. Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, “Pius XII: Collaborator and Kidnapper,” *WorldNetDaily*, January 13, 2005, http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=42363 (accessed September 20, 2005).
7. “New Bid to Smear Pope Pius XII Fails,” Catholic League News Release, January 14, 2005. http://www.catholicleague.org/05/press_releases/quarter%201/050114_piusxii.htm (accessed September 12, 2005).
8. “Rabbi threatens law suit against Vatican,” *NDTV.com*, January 27, 2005. <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20050002550> (accessed September 9, 2005).

9. For a useful summary see Gianni Valente, "Pio XII, Roncalli e i bambini ebrei: I fatti e i pregiudizi," *30 Giorni*, January 2005, <http://www.30giorni.it/articolo.asp?id=7357> (accessed September 9, 2005).
10. "I will not die before I canonize Pope Pius XII," *Inside the Vatican*, February 2005. <http://www.insidethevatican.com/newsflash-feb13-05.htm> (accessed March 25, 2005).
11. Sherrie Gossett, "New York Times Publicizes Phony Memo from the Pope's Pope," *Accuracy in Media*, April 16, 2005, <http://www.ndtv.com/morenews/showmorestory.asp?slug=67561> (accessed September 12, 2005); "AIM Report: The *New York Times*' Memogate Scandal," *Accuracy in Media*, July 15, 2005. http://www.aim.org/aim_report/3848_0_4_0_C/ (accessed September 12, 2005). For a similar line, see the well-informed P. Thierry, "NY Times Wrong: Pius XII Saved Jews," *NewsMax.com*, January 27, 2005, <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2005/1/27/101309.shtml> (accessed September 13, 2005).
12. Ronald J. Rychlak, "Postwar Catholics, Jewish Children, and a Rush to Judgment," *Beliefnet*, http://www.beliefnet.com/story/159/story_15942.html (accessed September 12, 2005).
13. Among the addressees was Cardinal Pierre Gerlier, Archbishop of Lyon, the president of the association of French bishops. This and other documents in this affair, including digital copies of originals (some difficult to read) may be found on "The Vatican Files," the Web site of Italian historian Matteo Luigi Napolitano: <http://www.vaticanfiles.net/intelligence2.htm> (accessed September 13, 2005).
14. See Katy Hazan, "Récupérer les enfants cachés: Un impératif des oeuvres juives dans l'après guerre," *Archives juives* 37, no. 2 (2004): 16–31. For controversies in Belgium, see Luc Dequeker, "Baptism and Conversion of Jews in Belgium, 1939–1945," in *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Belgians, Germans*, ed. Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), 247–53. The sharpest disputes were probably in the Netherlands, where the Catholic Church was, for the most part, not involved. See Joel S. Fishman, "The War Orphan Controversy in the Netherlands: Majority-Minority Relations," in Jozeph Michman and Tirtsah Levie, eds., *Dutch Jewish History: Proceedings of the Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands, November 28–December 3, 1982, Tel Aviv—Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Institute for Research on Dutch Jewry, 1984), 421–32; and Debórah Dwork, "Custody and Care of Jewish Children in the Postwar Netherlands: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Hegemony," in *Lessons and Legacies III: Memory, Memorialization, and Denial*, ed. Peter Hayes (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 119–30.
15. There has been no small interpretative confusion arising from the fact that *parents* in French can be translated in this context as "relatives" or "parents." As we shall see, Jewish petitioners to the Pope most often referred to "parents," in English, and this is the rendering I have chosen here.
16. The most famous instance of the Church's assertion of such claims involved the mid-nineteenth-century case of Edgardo Mortara, a 6-year-old Jewish boy from Bologna who was surreptitiously baptized by his family's Catholic servant. This case provoked a conflict of international scope during the pontificate of Pope Pius IX. Despite the family's strenuous efforts, Mortara never was returned to his parents. For a full discussion of the case, see David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

17. 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), 192. Compté's observation stems from an interview with the Catholic rescuer and Amitié Chrétienne activist Germaine Ribière in 1996.
18. Andrea Tornielli, "Pio XII e gli ebrei: Tutta la verità," *Il Giornale*, January 4, 2005; idem, "Ecco il vero documento su Pio XII e i bimbi ebrei," *Il Giornale*, January 11, 2005; and Matteo Luigi Napolitano, "Il frettoloso scoop del professor Melloni," *Il Giornale*, January 11, 2005.
19. A copy of the document can be viewed online at <http://www.vaticanfiles.net/intelligence2.htm> (accessed September 13, 2005).
20. See *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde guerre mondiale*, vol. 9, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre Janvier–Décembre 1943* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), 185, 306, 309–10, 321–22, 337, 371–72, 438, 469, 575, and passim; and vol. 10, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre. Janvier 1944–Juillet 1945* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1980), 161, 167, 292, 335, 390, and passim.
21. Jean Dujardin quoted in Nicolas Seneze, "Catholicisme: Polémique autour des enfants juifs baptisés sous l'Occupation," *La Croix*, January 8, 2005.
22. Valente, "Pio XII"; Giovanni Sale, "La vicenda dei bambini ebrei scampati all'Olocausto," *La Civiltà cattolica* (2005), available at http://www.vaticanfiles.net/sale_bambini-ebrei.htm (accessed September 19, 2005).
23. Editenne Fouilloux, ed., *Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli: Journal de France*, vol. 1, 1945–1948 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2006).
24. Seneze, "Catholicisme: Polémique." See also "Nuncio's Writings Tell of No Controversy over Jewish Children: Interview with Journalist Andrea Tornielli on Archbishop Roncalli's Files," *Zenit*, January 25, 2005. <http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=65325> (accessed September 15, 2005).
25. See World Jewish Congress, *Unity in Dispersion: A History of the World Jewish Congress* (New York: World Jewish Congress, 1948), 302 ff.
26. Myriam Kubowitzki, "Headlines of a Short Speech" [May 1945], Central Zionist Archives (CZA): C2/1929.
27. Gerhart Riegner, "Address Delivered at the Press Conference of the Foreign Press," Bern, October 11, 1945. Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM): WJC/Geneva, reel 51, file 368.
28. Kubowitzki to Tartakower, September 10, 1945. CZA: C2/1931.
29. Gerhart Riegner, "Address Delivered at the Press Conference of the Foreign Press."
30. [Stephen Barber], "The Programme of the W.J.C. in the Field of Relief and Reconstruction," USHMM: WJC/Geneva Office, reel 178, file 178.
31. Myriam Kubowitzki, "Headlines of a Short Speech," CZA: C2/1929.
32. Riegner to Goldmann, July 24, 1945. USHMM: WJC/Geneva Office, reel 74, file 489.

33. For some recent studies, see Nechama Tec, *Jewish Children: Between Protectors and Murderers* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005); Comte, *Sauvetages et baptêmes*; Nahum Bogner, "The Convent Children: The Rescue of Jewish Children in Polish Convents during the Holocaust," *Yad Vashem Studies* 27 (1999): 235–85; and Ewa Kurek-Lesik, "The Conditions of Admittance and the Social Background of Jewish Children Saved by Women's Religious Orders in Poland from 1939–1945," *Polin* 3 (1988): 244–75.
34. On the circumstances of baptism of Jewish children, see Comte, *Sauvetages et baptêmes*, chapters 11–13; Bogner, "The Convent Children," 266–76; and Dequeker, "Baptism and Conversion," 225–71.
35. For a useful Catholic perspective on the "sacramental problem" of baptism under the circumstances of the Holocaust, see Edward H. Flannery, "The Finaly Case," *The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judaeo-Christian Studies* 1 (1955): 306–13.
36. Memorandum, A. Treves to S. Wolkowicz, March 7, 1945, USHMM: American Jewish Archives, WJC/New York Office, Series H.
37. On the general subject see Debórah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). Of the nearly six million murdered Jews, historians now estimate that between one and one and a half million were children. This statistic is obviously difficult to verify because it depends in part on subjective definitions of childhood and on guesswork from records that do not always specify ages.
38. Ellen Hilb, Report: December, 1945–October, 1946, Part I, Activities in Europe, USHMM: WJC London Office, reel 191, file 1929.
39. Hazan, "Récupérer les enfants cachés," 16–17.
40. "Nuncio's Writings Tell of No Controversy," *Zenit*, January 25, 2005. <http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=65325> (accessed September 15, 2005).
41. Hazan, "Récupérer les enfants cachés," 23.
42. *Ibid*, 22.
43. Catherine Varchaver to Riegner, December 18, 1945, CZA: C3/703; "Les enfants juifs confiés durant l'occupation à des milieux chrétiens," USHMM: World Jewish Congress London Office, reel 191, file 1929.
44. Moshe Sharett (Shertok), then head of the political department of the Jewish Agency, had met with the pope in a seven-and-a-half-minute private audience a few months before, in April 1945. During the meeting he pressed for the return of Jewish children and promoted the Jewish case for Palestine. Sharett also expressed his "first duty to thank [the pope], and through him the Catholic Church on behalf of the Jewish people, for all they did in the different countries to save Jews, Jewish children [during the war]." Pius's response was cordial, although noncommittal. In a report to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, Sharett summarized the exchange: "I said: I want to insist on one thing, that we are grateful to the Catholic Church for what it has done in those countries that helped save our brothers; we are a nation with [a] good memory; we do not forget, as we do not forget the evils that are done to us, so we do not forget the good. Now we must claim back the children. I understand very well the convents' point of view, but for us it is not only a question of

saving children as human beings, it is a question of saving them as Jews. They must return to the bosom of Judaism and to the Jewish people. We hope to bring them all to Eretz Yisrael, to allow them a full Jewish life. [The pope] said, Yes, yes, I understand.” “Minutes of the Jewish Agency Executive,” April 22, 1945. CZA: S100/46 (marked “secret”). See also Gabriel Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 163.

45. Aryeh L. Kubovy (Leon Kubowitzki), “The Silence of Pope Pius XII and the Beginnings of the ‘Jewish Document,’” *Yad Vashem Studies* 6 (1967): 8n2.

46. “I felt a great satisfaction that the invitation had come so quickly,” he added, “but also greatly troubled because of the responsibilities and the importance of the mission I had assumed.” Kubowitzki’s description of the meeting and account of the interview may be found in the Central Zionist Archives: C2/1931. This version differs in some respects from the version published in *Yad Vashem Studies* years later and cited above.

47. Aryeh Leon Kubovy to Alex Easterman, October 14, 1963, USHMM: WJC/London Office, reel 197, file 1976. This amount, Kubowitzki later noted, “was the official equivalent of \$20,000—and had a real value of \$5,000.” Kubowitzki and Cantoni delivered the check to Montini immediately following the meeting with the pope. Kubovy, “Silence of Pope Pius XII,” 23. A news bulletin distributed by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) picked up a report in the Bern *Tagwacht* critical of the very idea of a payment to the Vatican. The JTA noted that “when the remnants of European Jewry live in despair and in need, there is no reason to make such a gift to the wealthiest institution in the world.” *JTA Daily News Bulletin*, October 12, 1945. CZA: C3/644.

48. Kubowitzki later observed that he met Gowen at the papal palace on the morning of the interview: “I saw Gowen. He took me into a corner and told me that he had been called to the Vatican [that] morning to obtain information. From his hesitant manner I realized immediately that either he had asked or had been asked to be present at the interview.”

49. This refers, presumably, to the man in red.

50. CZA: C2/1931. I have copied Kubowitzki’s own punctuation, with my comments in brackets.

51. See footnote 37.

52. My emphasis; this sentence was left out of Kubowitzki’s 1967 published account.

53. Given the pope’s conversation with Moshe Sharett on this subject some months earlier, there must be some doubt about Pacelli’s surprise on hearing about this issue from Kubowitzki. See footnote 44.

54. Kubowitzki felt uncomfortable, years later, with the wholesale attacks on Pius XII in the wake of Rolf Hochhuth’s play, *The Deputy*. “We cannot condone the Pope’s silence,” he wrote to Alex Easterman in 1963, disapproving of “the [World Jewish] Congress’ muteness on this matter. . . . But neither can we approve his being singled out as the only guilty one among the many mighty who did not act and whose inaction was worse than silence, but it is up to the Congress’ leadership to decide how to behave. . . . Anyhow, you and I know that if Pius XII did not speak up, as we wanted him to do, the Church in many occupied

countries was helpful and even courageous.” Aryeh Leon Kubovy to Alex Easterman, October 14, 1963, USHMM: WJC/London Office, reel 197, file 1976.

55. Kubovy, “Silence of Pope Pius XII,” 23.

56. *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde guerre mondiale*, vol. 8, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre, janvier 1941—décembre 1942* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), 466.

57. Gerhart M. Riegner, *Ne jamais désespérer: Soixante années au service du peuple juif et des droits de l’homme* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1998), 179; subsequently published in English as *Never Despair: Sixty Years in the Service of the Jewish People and the Cause of Human Rights* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2006).

58. For Riegner’s account see *ibid.*, 179–80.

59. *Ibid.*, 622–24.

60. Here I am following the account in S.Z. Shragai, “At the Opening of the Rescue Campaign” (Hebrew), in Yitzhak Goldshlag, ed., *Masa ha-hatsalah: Shevat 5706–Tishre 5707* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1947), 6–7.

61. Rabbi Herzog’s description of his trip, probably the minutes of an oral report, is to be found in his confidential *Report Submitted to the Executive of the General Council* (Va’ad Leumi) of the Jews in Palestine, October 3, 1946, CZA: Ji/7264. Herzog wrote: “the purpose of my trip was to save the children, to take them out of the hands of the Gentiles.” See also Michael Bar-Zohar, *Yaacov Herzog: A Biography* (London: Halban, 2005), 52–55.

62. For my description of the meeting with the pope I draw upon Herzog’s 1946 report to the Jewish leadership in Palestine, as well as Yitzhak Goldshlag’s 1947 pamphlet on Herzog’s rescue mission, *Masa ha-hatsalah* (see fn 60). This pamphlet was published on behalf of the rabbinical organizers of the trip. I know of two additional accounts of the meeting: the first by Shmuel Avigdor HaCohen, *Yechid be-doro: Megilat chayav shel ha-ga’on Rabi Itschak Aizeek Ha-Levi Herzog rosh rabanei Israel* (The Only One in His Generation: A Life Chronicle of the Learned Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1980), and a later discussion by Saul Meyzlish, *Rabanut be-se’arat ha-yamim: Chayav u-mishnato shel ha-rav Itschak Aizeek ha-Levi Herzog zt”l* (The Rabbinate in the Storm: The Life and Teachings of Rabbi Isaac HaLevi Herzog) (n.p.: Merhav, 1991), 69–70. The later two differ only slightly in their tone and overall assessment, and I suspect that both are based largely upon the account in the Goldschlag pamphlet.

63. See Rabbi HaCohen: “The Chief Rabbi did not refrain from emphasizing that this readiness [i.e., to receive a ‘new heart’] had to be upon ‘all of us.’ In this way, he hinted to the pope that he also expected him to have a ‘new heart’ with regards to the topics that he was to raise before him.” HaCohen, *Yechid be-doro*, 201.

64. Goldshlag, *Masa ha-hatsalah*.

65. Herzog himself made reference to his comments to the pope in a sermon he delivered later that year in Poland. See *Herzog Papers* in the Heichal Shlomo Archive, Jerusalem.

66. According to HaCohen's later account—but not that of 1947, we should note—Herzog was extremely disappointed with the results of the meeting. “With a handshake, the chief rabbi departed from the pope. During his departure from the office those who had escorted him, who were waiting outside, observed that the rabbi was very pale. And when they approached him they could easily see that he was seized with severe shivering. When the rabbi and his escorts left the Vatican district, the Chief Rabbi asked a man from the Jewish community to bring him immediately to a *mikveh* [a ritual bath] because he felt a need to immerse himself in purifying water.” HaCohen, *Yechid be-doro*, 202.
67. Report submitted to the Executive of the General Council [Va'ad Leumi] of the Jews in Palestine, October 3, 1946, CZA: Ji/7264 (Hebrew).
68. Isaac Herzog to Pope Pius XII, March 12, 1946. The full text of the document may be found at <http://www.vaticanfiles.net/intelligence3.htm> (accessed 9 May 2005).
69. Bar-Zohar, *Herzog*, 55.
70. The Report submitted to the Executive of the General Council specifically mentions Herzog's invocation of papal support in conversations in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Poland.
71. For a full account see Giovanni Sale, “La vicenda dei bambini ebrei scampati all'Olocausto,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* (2005), available at http://www.vaticanfiles.net/sale_bambiniebrei.htm (accessed September 19, 2005). See also Valente, “Pio XII.”
72. Sale, “La vicenda.”
73. Bar-Zohar, *Herzog*, 55.
74. On the Finaly Affair, see the following articles in the special issue of *Archives juives* (37, no. 2 [2004]): Catherine Poujol, “Le grand rabbin Jacob Kaplan et l'affaire Finaly: Guide, porte-parole et négociateur de la communauté juive”; Chantal Thoinet, “Au nom des valeurs républicaines et de la mémoire des leurs: Des militants de la laïcité face à l'affaire Finaly”; and Renée Dray-Bensouan, “L'affaire Finaly dans le regard de la presse marseillaise.”
75. Richard Owen, “Pope Pius XII—Sinner or (Almost) Saint,” *Timesonline*, February 5, 2005. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3933-1470629,00.html> (accessed September 20, 2005).
76. There is one additional scrap of information: in 1949, three years after his visit with the pope, Herzog visited the United States to raise money on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal. Briefing notes for introducing the rabbi include this remark: “Dr. Herzog, in 1946, conferred with Pope Pius XII on the problem of orphaned Jewish children in former German-occupied countries, who have been moved for safe-keeping to Catholic institutions. As a result of his intervention, the Vatican acted to facilitate the return of the youngsters to the jurisdiction of the Jewish communities in the respective countries.” “Chief Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog,” n.d., Herzog Papers, Heichal Shlomo Archive, Jerusalem.