Bearing False Witness
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Debunking Centuries of Anti-Catholic History

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In Memory of
Andrew M. Greeley
and Richard John Neuhaus
The myth of Catholic barbarity: This 1598 engraving, published in Holland, shows a Spanish don feeding Indian children to his dogs. It was typical of the anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic propaganda of the time.
Introduction
Confronting Distinguished Bigots

While growing up as an American Protestant with intellectual pretensions, I always wondered why Catholics made such a fuss over Columbus Day. Didn’t they see the irony in the fact that although Columbus was a Catholic, his voyage of discovery was accomplished against unyielding opposition from Roman Catholic prelates who cited biblical proof that the earth was flat and that any attempt to reach Asia by sailing West would result in the ships falling off the edge of the world?

Everybody knew that about the Catholics and Columbus. We not only learned it in school, the story of Columbus proving the world to be round also was told in movies, Broadway plays, and even in popular songs. Yet, there they were every October 12: throngs of Knights of Columbus members accompanied by priests, marching in celebration of the arrival of the “Great Navigator” in the New World. How absurd.

And how astonishing to discover many years later that the whole story about why Catholic advisors opposed Columbus was a lie.

By the fifteenth century (and for many centuries before) every educated European, including Roman Catholic prelates, knew the earth was round. The opposition Columbus encountered was not about the shape of the earth, but about the fact that he was wildly wrong about the circumference of the globe. He estimated it was about 2,800 miles from the Canary Islands to Japan. In reality it is about 14,000 miles. His clerical
opponents knew about how far it really was and opposed his voyage on grounds that Columbus and his men would all die at sea. Had the Western Hemisphere not been there, and no one knew it existed, the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria might as well have fallen off the earth, for everyone aboard would have died of thirst and starvation.

Amazingly enough, there was no hint about Columbus having to prove that the earth was round in his own journal or in his son’s book, History of the Admiral. The story was unknown until more than three hundred years later when it appeared in a biography of Columbus published in 1828. The author, Washington Irving (1783–1859), best known for his fiction—in The Legend of Sleepy Hollow he introduced the Headless Horseman. Although the tale about Columbus and the flat earth was equally fictional, Irving presented it as fact. Almost at once the story was eagerly embraced by historians who were so certain of the wickedness and stupidity of the Roman Catholic Church that they felt no need to seek any additional confirmation, although some of them must have realized that the story had appeared out of nowhere. Anyway, that’s how the tradition that Columbus proved the world was round got into all the textbooks.

By Washington Irving’s day, this was a well-worn pattern, as many vicious distortions and lies had entered the historical canon with the seal of distinguished scholarly approval, so long as they reflected badly on the Catholic Church (keep in mind that Catholics were refused admission to Oxford and Cambridge until 1871, and some American colleges did not admit them in those days either). Unfortunately, unlike the Columbus story, many of these equally spurious anti-Catholic accusations remain an accepted part of the Western historical heritage. Indeed, a survey of Austrian and German textbooks conducted in 2009 found that the falsehood about Columbus and the flat earth was still being taught in those nations.

It all began with the European wars stemming from the Reformation that pitted Protestants versus Catholics and took millions of lives.
during which Spain emerged as the major Catholic power. In response, Britain and Holland fostered intense propaganda campaigns that depicted the Spanish as bloodthirsty and fanatical barbarians. The distinguished medieval historian Jeffrey Burton Russell explained, “Innumerable books and pamphlets poured from northern presses accusing the Spanish Empire of inhuman depravity and horrible atrocities. . . . Spain was cast as a place of darkness, ignorance, and evil.” Informed modern scholars not only reject this malicious image, they even have given it a name: the “Black Legend.” Nevertheless, this impression of Spain and of Spanish Catholics remains very much alive in our culture—mere mention of the “Spanish Inquisition” evokes disgust and outrage.

But it wasn’t only angry Protestants who invented and embraced these tales. Many of the falsehoods considered in subsequent chapters were sponsored by antireligious writers, especially during the so-called Enlightenment, whose work was condoned only because it was seen as anti-Catholic rather than as what it truly was—although more recently such scholars have paraded their irreligion as well as their contempt for Catholicism. In his day, however, Edward Gibbon (1737–94) would surely have been in deep trouble had the bitterly antireligious views he expressed in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* not been incorrectly seen as applying only to Roman Catholicism. But, because in the days of the Roman Empire Catholicism was the only Christian church, Gibbon’s readers assumed his attacks were specific to Catholicism and not aimed at religion in general.

Although Gibbon was one of the very first “distinguished bigots,” he is in excellent company—the list of celebrated, anti-Catholic scholars (some of them still living) is long indeed. We will meet scores of them in subsequent chapters, some of them many times. Worse yet, in recent years some of the most malignant contributions to anti-Catholic history have been made by alienated Catholics, many of whom are seminary dropouts, former priests, or ex-nuns, such as John Cornwell, James Car-
roll, and Karen Armstrong. Normally, attacks originating with defectors from a particular group are treated with some circumspection. But, attacks on the Church made by “lapsed” Catholics are widely regarded as thereby of special reliability!

In any event, should you doubt that your knowledge of Western history is distorted by the work of these distinguished bigots, consider whether you believe any of the following statements:

▶ The Catholic Church motivated and actively participated in nearly two millennia of anti-Semitic violence, justifying it on grounds that the Jews were responsible for the Crucifixion, until the Vatican II Council was shamed into retracting that doctrine in 1965. But, the Church still has not made amends for the fact that Pope Pius XII is rightfully known as “Hitler’s Pope.”

▶ Only recently have we become aware of remarkably enlightened Christian gospels, long ago suppressed by narrow-minded Catholic prelates.

▶ Once in power as the official church of Rome, Christians quickly and brutally persecuted paganism out of existence.

▶ The fall of Rome and the ascendancy of the Church precipitated Europe’s decline into a millennium of ignorance and backwardness. These Dark Ages lasted until the Renaissance/Enlightenment, when secular scholars burst through the centuries of Catholic barriers against reason.

▶ Initiated by the pope, the Crusades were but the first bloody chapter in the history of unprovoked and brutal European colonialism.

▶ The Spanish Inquisition tortured and murdered huge numbers of innocent people for “imaginary” crimes, such as witchcraft and blasphemy.

▶ The Catholic Church feared and persecuted scientists, as the case of Galileo makes clear. Therefore, the Scientific “Revolution” occurred mainly in Protestant societies because only there could the Catholic Church not suppress independent thought.
Being entirely comfortable with slavery, the Catholic Church did nothing to oppose its introduction in the New World nor to make it more humane.

Until very recently, the Catholic view of the ideal state was summed up in the phrase, “The divine right of kings.” Consequently, the Church has bitterly resisted all efforts to establish more liberal governments, eagerly supporting dictators.

It was the Protestant Reformation that broke the repressive Catholic grip on progress and ushered in capitalism, religious freedom, and the modern world.

Each of these statements is part of the common culture, widely accepted and frequently repeated. But, each is false and many are the exact opposite of the truth! A chapter will be devoted to summarizing recent repetitions of each of these statements and to demonstrating that each is most certainly false.

It seems pertinent to point out that I did not set out to write this book from scratch. Rather, in the course of writing several other books on medieval history as well as on early Christianity, I kept encountering serious distortions rooted in obvious anti-Catholicism—the authors often explicitly expressed their hatred of the Church. Having written asides in these earlier books on many of the examples listed above, I finally decided that the issue of distinguished anti-Catholic history is too important and its consequences too pervasive to be left to these scattered refutations. So I gathered, revised, and substantially extended my previous discussions while adding new ones. In doing so, I have not attempted to “whitewash” Church history. In these same earlier books, I wrote at some length on such matters as corrupt clergy, brutal attacks on “heretics,” and on more recent misdeeds and shortcomings of the Church, such as covering up for pedophile priests and the misguided advocacy of liberation theology. But no matter how much importance one places on these negative aspects of Church history, it does not justify the extreme exaggerations, false accusations,
and patent frauds addressed in the chapters that follow. Faced with this enormous literature of lies, I have heeded the words of Columbia University’s Garrett Mattingly (1900–62), “Nor does it matter at all to the dead whether they receive justice at the hands of succeeding generations. But to the living, to do justice, however belatedly, should matter.”

You may be wondering, if these are notorious falsehoods, why do they persist? In part because they are so mutually reinforcing and deeply embedded in our common culture that it seems impossible for them not to be true. One easily assumes that in our “enlightened” times, surely these claims would have been rejected long ago if they were false. I confess that when I first encountered the claim that not only did the Spanish Inquisition spill very little blood but that it mainly was a major force in support of moderation and justice, I dismissed it as another exercise in outlandish, attention-seeking revisionism. Upon further investigation, I was stunned to discover that in fact, among other things, it was the Inquisition that prevented the murderous witchcraft craze, which flourished in most of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from spreading to Spain and Italy. Instead of burning witches, the inquisitors sent a few people to be hanged because they had burned witches.

Be assured that you will not be asked to take my word on these refutations. Sometimes I have done basic research needed to overturn one of these spurious anti-Catholic claims, and in those cases I document my findings so fully that anyone can check them. But, in most instances, I am simply reporting the prevailing view among qualified experts. Unfortunately, even though they often grumble because a particular anti-Catholic fabrication lives on, most of these experts continue to write only for one another and do not undertake to share their knowledge with the general reading public—the Columbus myth remained in the textbooks and popular culture for decades after scholars had traced it back to its fraudulent origins. I have undertaken to make the

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work of these fine scholars widely available, taking care to cite and fully acknowledge their work—short biographies of major contributors will be presented in each chapter.

Finally, I am not a Roman Catholic, and I did not write this book in defense of the Church. I wrote it in defense of history.
The myth of the Church as condoning anti-Semitic violence: Found throughout the Internet, this image is almost always identified as a photograph of Pope Pius XII greeting Adolf Hitler—despite the fact that the Catholic prelate shown here is lacking the pope’s very distinctive nose. It is, in fact, a photograph of Archbishop Cesare Orsenigo, the Vatican’s ambassador to Germany.
“FOR CENTURIES, persecution of the Jews was justified in the name of God. The inspiration for the medieval ghettos and for the bloody pogroms of history was provided by the doctrine that the Jews had murdered Christ and thereby provoked God’s eternal wrath and punishment.”¹

That is the first paragraph of a book I published many years ago. It seems appropriate to begin this chapter by explaining how I came to write it.

During my first year of graduate school at Berkeley, I was recruited by the director of the Survey Research Center to work on a major research project devoted to studying anti-Semitism, funded by the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith. I was soon assigned to that portion of the research devoted to the effects of Christian teachings on negative beliefs and feelings about Jews. Although I had not yet even earned my master’s degree, I soon took primary responsibility for designing and executing major public opinion surveys devoted to this topic, analyzing the results, and writing the book *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism*.

Not surprisingly, the data showed that there was a significant link between belief and prejudice—those American Christians who blamed “the Jews” for the Crucifixion were also more likely to accept standard anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jews as avaricious, cheap, clannish, unethical, and unpatriotic. Consequently, before I had completed a draft of the book, I was asked to prepare a brief summary of the findings to be distributed to the bishops attending Vatican II—the remarkable
Ecumenical Council convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962. According to Cardinal Augustin Bea, as quoted in the New York Times, that summary of mine played a significant role in producing the council’s statement on the Jews (Nostra Aetate), which read:

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

I was very pleased that the council had acted, and was proud to have played any part in bringing it about. However, at that time I was far too unsophisticated to appreciate the many subtleties in the council’s text, and I lacked sufficient historical background to realize that there really wasn’t anything new here—that the Church never had taught that the Jews were outside God’s love. And it was many years before I became aware of the extent to which the Catholic Church has stood as a consistent barrier against anti-Semitic violence, albeit Christians who attacked the Jews often justified their actions on religious grounds. My awareness of these matters grew as I worked on different aspects of ancient and medieval history—in one instance writing a long analysis of all known outbursts of anti-Semitic violence in both Europe and Islam,
spanning the period 500 through 1600. Eventually, this work forced me to reconsider the entire link between Christianity and anti-Semitism.

Keep in mind that through the many centuries there have been a huge number of Roman Catholic clergy—some of them saints, some of them opportunists, some of them devout, some of them corrupt, many of them ignorant, a few of them atheists, and even an occasional howling lunatic. Not surprisingly, some of these clergy did believe that God hated all the Jews, and even a few may have gotten involved in outbursts of anti-Semitic violence. But, as will be seen, such views and actions did not have official standing and did not reflect the normal behavior of Catholic clergy toward Jews. To the contrary, the clergy often defended local Jews from attacks, sometimes risking their own lives by doing so.

Inventing Anti-Semitism

Let’s begin at the start: many contemporary scholars charge that the Church originated anti-Semitism. The celebrated feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether has even claimed that “the church must bear a substantial responsibility for a tragic history of the Jew in Christendom which was the foundation upon which political anti-Semitism and the Nazi use of it was erected.” Jules Isaac struck the same chord: “without centuries of Christian catechism, propaganda, and vituperation, the Hilterian teachings, propaganda, and vituperation would not have been possible.” And, according to Robert T. Osborn, “Christians have been anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic, apparently from the beginning.”

These charges are based on passages in the New Testament that attack the Jews for rejecting Christ and for persecuting Christians, although all of the scholars who believe that the Christians invented anti-Semitism know that deep hostility toward Jews existed long before the birth of Jesus. Perhaps because of their antagonism toward the early Church, scholars dismissed what the ancients sometimes felt toward the Jews as merely “antipathy.” It did not amount to anything lasting and basic, such as what might be called anti-Semitism, but was momentary, arising
entirely from political conflicts such as the Maccabean Revolt. In fact, these negative feelings toward Jews were only “sporadic,” mere “isolated pockets of distemper.” In contrast, they claimed real anti-Semitism was deep and abiding, something entirely new introduced by Christianity and born of Christian arrogance and ambition. If this were so, then many leading Roman intellectuals must have been secret Christians!

It was the great Roman philosopher and statesman Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE) who denounced Jews as an “accursed race” and condemned their influence. It was Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), regarded as the greatest Roman orator, who complained that Jewish rites and observances were “at variance with the glory of our empire, [and] the dignity of our name.” It was the esteemed Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (56–117 CE) who railed against the Jews because they “despise the gods” and called their religious practices “sinister and revolting.” Not only that, according to Tacitus, the Jews had “entrenched themselves by their very wickedness” and they sought “increasing wealth” through “their stubborn loyalty” to one another. He remarked: “But the rest of the world they confront with hatred reserved for enemies.” I am unable to detect how Tacitus’s complaints differ from standard modern anti-Semitism as it usually is defined and measured.

Nor was it only a matter of words. The Jews were expelled from Rome in 139 BCE by an edict that charged them with attempting “to introduce their own rites” to the Romans and thereby “to infect Roman morals.” Then, in 19 CE, Emperor Tiberius ordered the Jews in Rome to burn all their religious vestments and assigned all Jewish males of military age to serve in Sardinia to suppress brigandage, where, according to Tacitus, “if they succumbed to the pestilential climate, it was a cheap loss.” In addition, all other Jews were banished not only from the city, but from Italy “on pain of slavery for life if they did not obey,” as told by Paulinus Suetonius (c. 71–135 CE). In 70 CE, Emperor Vespasian imposed a special tax on all Jews in the empire, thereby impounding their contributions that had been made annually to the temple in Jerusalem. And in 95 CE, Emperor Domitian executed his cousin Flavius Clemens and
“many others” for having “drifted into Jewish ways,” as Cassius Dio (163–229 CE) put it.16

Even so, the Romans did not invent anti-Semitism. There are several surviving versions of an account of an expulsion of lepers and undesirable foreigners from Egypt that parallel the Exodus. These accounts have been interpreted by some scholars as the first appearance of anti-Semitism. There also are quite hostile treatments of the Jews as godless misanthropes, written in the first century BCE by Greeks, including Didorus Siculus (c. 90 BCE–30 BCE), Strabo (c. 63 BCE–24 CE), and Apion (20 BCE–45 CE), who even accused the Jews of ritual cannibalism.17

Clearly, then, anti-Semitism did not arise from the conflict between Christians and Jews as to the divinity of Jesus. Rather, it stemmed from the intense commitment that exclusive religions invariably generate among their adherents and the hostile responses this commitment provokes among outsiders. As the distinguished E. Mary Smallwood put it, Jewish “[e]xclusiveness bred unpopularity, which in turn bred anti-Semitism,”18 just as Christian exclusiveness subsequently bred Roman antagonism toward them too. In fact, not only were Jews and Christians persecuted by Rome, but so were some exclusive pagan faiths, including congregations devoted to Isis and to Cybele (Magna Mater).19

With the demise of these pagan faiths and the rise of Christianity, anti-Semitism was the only one of these ancient prejudices to survive. But unless one believes that the Church was the only channel of cultural transmission, there is no reason to suppose this legacy of pre-Christian anti-Semitism did not live on in Western Civilization—probably often linked to definitions of Jews as religious outsiders, but not dependent on that linkage. That is, antagonism toward Jews probably had a life of its own, rooted in classical times and sensitive to continuing Jewish exclusiveness. For example, the New Testament does not portray Jews as wealthy misers, but this image was as central to the medieval hatred of Jews as it was to Tacitus and his fellow Romans. In addition, of course, is the anti-Semitism inherent in the theological conflict between the two faiths.
Early Religious Conflict

There are a number of harsh, fearful, and hostile references to Jews scattered throughout the New Testament. One of the most incendiary and most frequently cited of these is the passage in Matthew 27:24–26: “So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’ Then the people as a whole answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’ So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.”

Other examples include:

▶ Matthew 23:37: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.”
▶ John 5:16–18: “Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things [curing a sick man] on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My father is still working, and I also am working.’ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father.”

Understandably, passages such as these have caused many modern Christians a great deal of anguish as well as provoked bitterness among many Jews. Unfortunately, in condemning these and similar New Testament passages, Christian apologists and Jewish critics far too often interpret them out of context and in wholly noncomparative ways. As for context, these lines were written by men who still regarded themselves as Jews, albeit of a more enlightened kind, and were addressed to Jews who had failed, or who refused, to recognize “progress.” Thus, harsh Christian critics, such as J. T. Sanders, should not focus entirely on the New Testament but also should compare its statements about the Jews with Old Testament polemics against other Jews who failed to meet a particular prophet’s standards of proper faith. For example, Jeremiah (18:23) asked the Lord: “Do not forgive their iniquity, do not blot
out their sin from your sight. Let them be tripped up before you: deal
with them while you are angry.” Then, warming to his theme, Jeremiah
(19:7–9) quoted the Lord’s response: “And in this place I will make void
the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will make them fall by the sword
before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will
give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the wild
animals of the earth. . . . And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons
and the flesh of their daughters.”

Dozens of similar verses can be found in the Old Testament and pro-
vide a context within which the New Testament polemics can be seen as
typical of “in-house prophetic criticism.”

In similar fashion, much anguish about anti-Jewish statements in the
New Testament arises because they are anachronistically taken to be
the statements of a nasty and abusive Christian majority. No account
is taken of the fact that when these passages were written, Christians
were a tiny, persecuted minority, not only amid the huge Greco-Roman
empire, but vis-à-vis the large populations of Jews, including those in
Palestine and those making up the many substantial diasporan commu-
nities of Jews scattered in the various larger Greco-Roman cities. For it
was within these Jewish communities that the early Christians concen-
trated their efforts to convert. As late as the year 100 CE, by which time
the Gospels already were in circulation, there probably were slightly
fewer than 8,000 Christians on earth, and even a century later, there
still were only about 200,000 Christians. In contrast, there were about 7
million Jews—only a million of them in Palestine. In early days, it was
not the Romans, but the surrounding Jewish populations who were the
most serious source of danger to Christians.

The evidence of Jewish persecution of Christians is scattered and
obviously very incomplete, but there are compelling reasons to believe
that persecution was common and that it continued for several centu-
ries. For one thing, Christianity was an intolerable abomination in the
eyes of observant Jews. Unlike pagans whose sins could be dismissed as
those of ignorant outsiders, Christian disregard of the Law was a lapse
by those, many of whom had been raised as Jews, who claimed to be the rightful heirs to the entire Jewish tradition. Worse yet, the Christians were asserting an outrageous heresy, not only by claiming that Jesus was the promised messiah, but by proclaiming him the Son of God, they seemed to dispense with monotheism. In the eyes of religious Jews, these were terrible offenses that required violent responses.

As for evidence of actual Jewish attempts to punish these crimes, we do know that in Acts 22:4–5 Paul confessed that prior to his conversion in about the year 35 CE, he delivered Christians to the “high priest and council of elders” for punishment, and Acts reports several instances during which “apostles” were flogged. The deacon Stephen was stoned to death by order of the Sanhedrin in about the year 37 CE. Then, after Paul had shifted his mission efforts to the West, he received a number of beatings and an unsuccessful stoning by local Jewish leaders in various cities. Next, according to the great Jewish historian Josephus (37–101 CE), and confirmed by Christian historian Eusebius (263–339 CE), James, the brother of Jesus and head of the church, was publicly mocked and executed by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem in 61 or 62 CE. The Jewish threat was real.

Consequently, a number of scholars have pointed out that the anti-Jewish passages found in the New Testament should be interpreted as only one side of a very angry religious conflict. But what has been missing is firm evidence of the other side, of contemptuous anti-Christian expressions in Jewish sources, such as the Talmud, the collection of writings by learned rabbis that began in the first century. Some viciously anti-Christian passages alleged to come from the Talmud were published by a Spanish Dominican friar in the thirteenth century (said to have been leaked to him by Jewish converts to Christianity) and were later quoted by Martin Luther. A similar two-volume work was published in Germany in 1700. Both publications attracted attention from anti-Semites who cited them in angry pamphlets, but their authenticity was disavowed by both Jews and Christians—complaints by the Jewish community in Frankfurt caused the German volumes to be confiscated.
by the government. Thus, it has long been the general scholarly belief that there were no authentic references to Jesus in the Talmud, and that aside from several isolated incidents, there was no significant Jewish persecution of Christians. Hence, James Everett Seaver confidently reported that Jewish hatred of the early Christians “has no existence in historical fact.”

This view has now been completely refuted by Peter Schäfer’s superb study. Having impeccable credentials as director of Judaic Studies at Princeton, Schäfer worked with both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds—the former having been written by rabbis in the first and second centuries while the latter probably dating from the third through sixth centuries. Scattered through these enormous compendia, there are in fact many remarks about Jesus. As Schäfer characterized them:

They are counternarratives that parody the New Testament stories, most notably the story of Jesus’ birth and death. They ridicule Jesus’ birth from a virgin. . . . Most remarkably, they counter the New Testament Passion story with its message of Jews’ guilt and shame as Christ killers. Instead, they reverse it completely: Yes, they maintain, we accept responsibility for it, but there is no reason to feel ashamed because we rightfully executed a blasphemer and idolater. Jesus deserved death, and got what he deserved. Accordingly, they subvert the Christian idea of Jesus’ resurrection by having him punished forever in hell and making clear that this fate awaits his followers as well, who believe in this impostor.

Schäfer continued more specifically:

- Although she was married to Joseph, Mary conceived during an adulterous interlude with a Roman soldier named Pandera (the name perhaps being a play on the word *parthenos*, or virgin). According to Jewish Law, both should have been stoned to death.
- Jesus was a *mamzer* (a bastard) and would have thereby been
excluded from any participation in Jewish religious life—in some interpretations of the Law, mamzers were themselves to be stoned.

- Jesus engaged in sexual promiscuity with Mary Magdalene among others.
- Jesus was convicted of sorcery.
- Jesus was not crucified, but instead was stoned by Jews who then hanged his body upon a tree.
- Jesus is spending eternity in hell, boiling in excrement.

So there we have it. New Testament antagonism toward the Jews is fully balanced by Talmudic antagonism toward the Christians—and keep in mind that most of this exchange took place when Christians were the tiny minority. Of course, when Christians became the overwhelming majority, their attitudes toward Jews became of far greater social significance than whatever anti-Christianism Jews sustained in that era. But misleading or misled historians to the contrary, the Church did not translate the antagonisms of the New Testament into a warrant for anti-Semitic attacks.

The Church and Anti-Semitic Attacks

In preparation for writing a book on the historical consequences of monotheism, I undertook to assemble data on every fatal anti-Semitic attack by groups of western European Christians from the year 500 through 1600. I began with the year 500 because reported conflicts prior to that are very poorly documented and of dubious historicity. In any event, as I assembled reliably documented instances, I discovered something quite remarkable: there appears to have been only one such event between the years 500 and 1096—a mob killed several Jews at Clermont in Southern Gaul (now France) in 554 and forced a number of others to accept Christian baptism. That there were no other such incidents reflects the fact that the Church condemned this act, stressing that forced conversions were invalid and that Jews should be let alone, a position that was asserted again and again by the Church through the
centuries; the prohibition on forced baptism was even applied to Muslims during the Crusades.\textsuperscript{37}

My inability to find any other attacks during this long period has been confirmed by distinguished Jewish historians. The Israeli historian Nachum T. Gidal referred to this era as the “Halcyon Days”\textsuperscript{38} of Christian-Jewish relations, and the prize-winning scholar of Jewish history, Robert Chazan, described the period as “tranquil.”\textsuperscript{39} Léon Poliakov (1910–97), one of the most respected contemporary historians of anti-Semitism, wrote of the “favorable status of Jews” during this era: “Kings, nobles and bishops granted Jews a broad autonomy: thus they administered their own communities and lived according to their own laws. Talmudic scholarship flowered again on the banks of the Rhine and the Seine at the very period when it was falling into decay in Babylonia. . . . [The Jews] continued to mix freely with the Christian populations and to live on excellent terms with them. . . . Until the eleventh century, no chronicles mention outbursts of popular hatred of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{40} Thus, it was that for more than five centuries, hostile New Testament statements about Jews had no violent consequences.

A number of medieval historians have pointed out that during this same era the Church took virtually no interest in heresy. Not that there were no heretics, but that the Church chose to ignore them.\textsuperscript{41} In my judgment, the two phenomena are linked—the tolerant policies toward both Jews and heretics were a function of the fact that neither posed any institutional threat to the Church. Stated more formally: where a relatively secure religious monopoly exists, a substantial amount of religious nonconformity will be tolerated to the extent that the dissenters are perceived as posing no threat to the power of the religious elite.\textsuperscript{42} The Church felt secure and tranquility prevailed.

This era of toleration ended in the eleventh century because the conflict with Islam that boiled over into the Crusades changed perceptions of religious threats. Major religious conflicts will generate a general climate of religious intolerance, causing toleration to be withheld or withdrawn even from nonthreatening, but nonconforming, religious
groups. This need not even be the policy of the leaders of the monopoly Church—conflict may generate a climate of opinion that prompts members of the laity to action on behalf of perceived religious threats. This explains the eleventh-century explosion of fatal anti-Semitic outbursts in parts of Christendom as well as the initiation of bloody campaigns against heresy. It also is consistent with the fact that as serious conflict with Christianity broke out, similar anti-Semitic attacks and heresy-hunting began within Islam!

Catholic clergy initiated the violent repression of heresies that began in the eleventh century, many of which escalated into bloody campaigns, such as those against the Cathars (Albigensians). But the clergy did not initiate or lead the outbursts of anti-Semitism that began then too. These were led by laymen, and it was churchmen who stood up against them and usually managed to prevent further attacks.

Some historians believe that there were anti-Jewish attacks in the wake of the “People’s Crusade,” that “ramshackle horde” of men, women, and children who followed Peter the Hermit all the way to Turkey in 1096, only to be massacred. Other historians report no such attacks. It is agreed, however, that Peter’s followers looted and extorted their way east and that both Christians and Jews were victimized.

However, it is well documented that more than five centuries of tranquility in Jewish-Christian relations ended on May 3, 1096, when a minor Rhineland count, Emich of Leisingen, led an attack on the Jewish population of Speyer (Spier). Emich had been left in charge when his duke marched off to the Holy Land in the force raised by Henry IV, the holy Roman emperor, to fight the First Crusade. Emich was supposed to organize a company of reinforcements and then bring them east to join the campaign. Because a false rumor had been circulating that before he marched east Henry IV planned to murder all the Jews in the Rhineland to avenge the death of Christ, Henry had written to all his vassals denouncing this story and commanding them to see to the safety of all Jews. But Emich still believed that it made no sense to march off to fight
God’s enemies in the East while leaving behind the enemies of Christ. So he led his men to Speyer.

However, the bishop of Speyer took the local Jews under his protection, and Emich’s forces could only lay their hands on a dozen Jews who had somehow failed to heed the bishop’s alarm. All twelve were killed. Then Emich led his forces to Worms. Here, too, the bishop took the local Jews into his palace for protection. But this time Emich would have none of that, and his forces broke down the bishop’s gates and killed about five hundred Jews. The same pattern was repeated the following week in Mainz. Just as before, the bishop attempted to shield the Jews, but he was attacked and forced to flee for his life. The same actions occurred again in Cologne and then in Metz. As Léon Poliakov summed up: “It is important to note that almost everywhere . . . bishops attempted, sometimes even at the peril of their own lives, to protect the Jews.”

At this point, a portion of Emich’s forces broke away and set out to purge the Moselle Valley of Jews. Being careful only to attack towns without a resident bishop, they managed to kill several thousand Jews.

Meanwhile, two other leaders of reinforcements also attacked Jews. Volkmar overwhelmed the opposition of the local bishop and massacred Jews in Prague. Gottschalk led a murderous attack on the Jews of Ratisbon (Regensburg). The pope “harshly condemned” all these attacks, “but there was little more he could do.”

However, it turned out that there was a lot that the knights of Hungary could do. When Volkmar and his forces reached Hungary and attempted to continue their attacks on Jews, they were wiped out by Hungarian knights who rode in support of their bishop. The same fate befell Gottschalk. And when Emich and his forces reached Hungary, they too were denied passage because of their bloody attacks on Jews. When they tried to force their way through, they also were dispatched by Hungarian knights.

According to the revered historian of the Crusades Sir Steven Runciman (1903–2000), these defeats struck “most good Christians” as “punishments meted out from on high to the murderers of Jews.” This was.
consistent with the efforts of local bishops to preserve the Jews and with the fact that other armies gathered for the First Crusade did not molest Jews—with the exception of several hundred Jews who died in Jerusalem when the entire city was massacred subsequent to its fall to Crusaders.

Unfortunately, while the attacks on the Rhineland Jews were the work of a few, they set a pattern by directing attention to the issue of continuing to permit Jews to reject Jesus in a context where religious conformity was of growing concern. Even a few churchmen succumbed to this temptation. By the time of the Second Crusade (1146–49), Abbé Pierre of the French monastery at Cluny pointed out, “What good is the good of going to the end of the world at great loss of men and money, to fight Saracens, when we permit among us other infidels who are a thousand times more guilty toward Christ than are the Mohammedans?”

Nevertheless, it was not in France, but only in the Rhine Valley that massacres of Jews took place during the Second Crusade—once again in Cologne, Mainz, Metz, Worms, and Speyer. In this instance, a monk named Radulph helped stir up the anti-Semitic outbursts. But the death toll would have been far higher had it not been for Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who rode to the Rhine Valley and ordered an end to the killings. This intervention was reported by Ephraim of Bonn, a Jewish chronicler:

Then the Lord heard our sigh. . . . He sent after the evil priest a decent priest, a great man. . . . His name was Abbot Bernard, from the city of Clairvaux . . . [who] said to them “It is fitting that you go forth against Muslims. However, anyone who attacks a Jew and tries to kill him is as though he attacks Jesus himself. My pupil Radulph who advised destroying them did not advise properly. For in the book of Psalms is written concerning the Jews, “Kill them not, lest my people forget.” Everyone esteemed this priest as one of their saints. . . . Were it not for the mercies of our Creator Who sent the aforesaid abbot
... there would not have been a remnant or survivor among the Jews.54

Soon the Crusades petered out, but the outbursts of violence against the Jews continued in the Rhineland. The earlier incidents had penetrated deeply into the popular culture; additionally, this was an area markedly lacking in political authority. Instead, it was a “politically fractured area”55 where a variety of heretical movements arose and prospered because neither Church nor government could suppress them, and it was here that mobs continued to attack Jews. Thus, in 1270, local rabble-rousers who claimed to be descendants of the Judenbreter (Jews-roasters) of the Crusade era, killed Jews all along the Rhine. Similar attacks occurred again in 1283, 1285, 1286, and 1298.56

When the Black Death (1347–50) broke out in Europe, it was once again only in the Rhine Valley that the Church was unable to protect the Jews against charges that they had brought on the plague by secretly poisoning the wells. This story began in Spain, where initially it was claimed to have been Muslims who poisoned the wells. Then the story changed, and the Spanish Jews were accused of spreading the plague and so that is where the initial anti-Semitic attacks began. But they were quickly stopped cold by the local bishops, armed with a bull issued by Pope Clement IV, who directed the clergy to protect the Jews, denounced all claims about poisoned wells, and ordered that those who spread that rumor, as well as anyone who harmed Jews, be excommunicated.57

But even papal authority failed in the Rhineland. So, once again, a wave of Jewish massacres swept along the Rhine, through the familiar list of cities: Speyer, Mainz, Metz, Worms, and Cologne. Why did rabid anti-Semitism persist only here and not in other German areas? As noted, probably because elsewhere local elites were sufficiently powerful to have prevented a tradition of Jew-killing from getting started. As to why lethal attacks on local Jews ceased in the Rhineland early in the fifteenth century, there were no Jews there anymore. First came a massive migration of Jews from the Rhine Valley to Eastern Europe.
At the same time, many of these notoriously anti-Semitic communities evicted their Jews—Cologne did so in 1424 and most of the rest soon after. No Jews were permitted to reside in these areas again until the middle of the nineteenth century! The eviction of the Rhineland Jews was not the doing of the Church as is evident in the fact that large Jewish communities remained scattered across the rest of Germany. Keep in mind, too, that when Jews were expelled elsewhere, as from England (1290), France (1306), and Spain (1492), this was done as the work of secular authorities, not at the urging of the Church.

But if the Church stood as a barrier to attacks on the Jews of Europe, it did collaborate in many forms of discrimination against them. In most places, the construction of synagogues required permission, there were disputes as to when Passover could be celebrated, and conversion from Christianity to Judaism was strictly forbidden. Many prohibitions were placed on social contacts between Christians and Jews: intermarriage was illegal and so were sexual relations, and Jews could not have Christian servants. Eventually, in most parts of Europe, Jews were required to wear a badge or some other identifying mark. Often, too, Jews were required to live in a special part of town, which came to be known as the ghetto (a corruption of the Italian borghetto, or “little borough”).

**Muslims and Jews**

For generations, historians have identified the situation of the Jews in Muslim Spain as a “Golden Age,” in contrast with the brutal anti-Semitism of Christendom. No one disagreed with Stanley Lane-Poole when in 1897 he claimed that “the history of Spain offers us a melancholy contrast. For nearly eight centuries under her Mohammedan rulers, Spain set all Europe a shining example of a civilised and enlightened state. . . . Whatever makes a kingdom great and prosperous, whatsoever tends to refinement and civilization was found in Moslem Spain.”
He went on to contrast this shining example with the cruel and fanatical Spain that expelled the Jews following the final defeat of the Moors by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.

Nor did anyone challenge the celebrated Jewish historian Heinrich Hirsh Graetz when he asserted, “Judaism ever strove towards the light, whilst monastic Christianity remained in darkness. Thus in the tenth century there was only one country that offered suitable soil for the development of Judaism, where it could blossom and flourish—it was Mahometan Spain.” And most intellectuals nodded in agreement when Albert Einstein’s son-in-law Rudolf Kayer exulted, “It is like a historical miracle that in the very same era of history” in which “orgies of persecution” against Jews occurred in Christina Europe, the Jews of Moorish Spain “enjoyed a golden age, the like of which they had not known since the days of the Bible.” Not to be outdone, Anthony Burgess wrote that after the fall of Granada, “The magnificent Emirate of Córdoba, where beauty, tolerance, learning and order prevailed, was only a memory.” Indeed, in a volume commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Christian Spain, it was noted that the “Golden Age of Spanish Jewry . . . was personified above all by Maimonides.”

It is difficult to know how anyone, even the most bitter anti-Catholic, could truly have believed any of this! By itself, the biography of Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) makes a travesty of all these claims. In 1148, the Maimonides family pretended to convert to Islam when the Jews of Córdoba were told to become Muslims or leave, upon pain of death. Note that when most historians mention that in 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella ordered the Jews of Spain to convert to Christianity or leave, they forget to mention that the Muslims had imposed the same demand in the twelfth century. Nor do they mention that many Jews who opted to leave Moorish Spain rather than pretend to convert settled in the Christian areas of northern Spain. In any event, after eleven years of posing as converts, the Maimonides family became so fearful of discovery
that they fled to Morocco where they continued their deception. Thus, throughout his adult life, the most celebrated medieval Jewish thinker posed as a Muslim. His story clearly reveals that, as Richard Fletcher has put it so well, “Moorish Spain was not a tolerant and enlightened society even in its most cultivated epoch.”

In fact, just as Jews lived as a suppressed minority in Christendom, even during the “tranquil” period both Jews and Christians were always placed under severe restrictions and were highly stigmatized in Muslim societies. As the remarkable historian of Islam Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1922–68) pointed out, from very early times Muslim authorities often went to great lengths to humiliate and punish dhimmis—those being Jews and Christians who refused to convert to Islam. It was official policy that dhimmis should “feel inferior and to know ‘their place’ . . . [imposing laws such as] that Christians and Jews should not ride horses, for instance, but at most mules, or even that they should wear certain marks of their religion on their costume when among Muslims.” In some places, non-Muslims were prohibited from wearing clothing similar to that of Muslims, nor could they be armed. In addition, non-Muslims were invariably severely taxed compared with Muslims.

That Christians imposed equally disgraceful humiliations upon Jews is beside the point, which is that the claim about Islam’s greater tolerance is an absurd fiction. Historians have managed to get away with such spurious nonsense not only by carefully ignoring dhimmitude, but also by twisting the fact that in both Christian and Muslim areas there was a long tranquil period in relations with Jews and by choosing to compare the tranquil era in Islam with the later era of anti-Semitic violence in Christendom. But just as Christian intolerance was greatly heightened by the conflicts with Islam involving the Crusades, so, too, did these conflicts result in similar outbursts in Islam. In Grenada alone, thousands of Jews were massacred late in the eleventh century, a fact that goes unmentioned in the many historical accounts of “glorious” Grenada. In similar fashion, Western biographers of Muhammad have been reluctant to acknowledge (or quick to justify) that the first Mus-
lim massacre of Jews occurred in Medina when Muhammad had all the local adult Jewish males (about seven hundred of them) beheaded after forcing them to dig their own graves.⁷⁰

The Eleventh Commandment

When all is said and done, the most compelling question about the Church and anti-Semitism may not be why Christians sometimes attacked the Jews, but why they tolerated them at all. Unlike Christian heretics such as the Cathars, Waldensians, Fraticelli, and similar groups, the Jews were the only sizeable, openly nonconformist religious group that survived in Europe until the Lutherans did so by force of arms. As Robert Chazan observed, despite being the objects of suspicion and enduring many forms of discrimination, the “essential fact remained . . . that Jews were to be permitted to exist within Christian society and to fulfill their religious obligations as Jews.”⁷¹

Christians made this exception for the Jews because of the theological doctrine that the Second Coming would be ushered in by the conversion of the Jews, which was interpreted to mean that Jewish nonconformity was part of God’s plan and that their eventual conversion was in God’s hands as well. Consequently, no pope in the Middle Ages ever undertook a campaign to convert the Jews,⁷² and Saint Augustine (354–430) taught that anyone who killed Jews would “suffer [God’s] sevenfold vengeance.”⁷³ As for those who would dismiss these as mere words, it seems appropriate here to quote at length the highly respected historian Steven T. Katz, director of the Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies at Boston University. Identifying “Thou Shalt Not Annihilate the Jews” as the “Eleventh Christian Commandment,” Katz wrote:

Though Christendom possessed the power, over the course of nearly fifteen hundred years, to destroy that segment of the Jewish people it dominated, it chose not to do so . . . because the physical extirpation of Jewry was never, at any time, the
**Box 1.1.** Some leading historians whose work informed this chapter. Specific studies by each can be found in the bibliography.

**Robert Chazan** is professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. He studied to become a rabbi at Jewish Theological Seminary (graduated in 1962) and then earned his PhD from Columbia University in 1967. He has published a dozen books, all of them well received.

**David G. Dalin** is an American Conservative rabbi and historian. He received his PhD in history from Brandeis University and has held distinguished visiting appointments at various universities and institutes, including Princeton and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He has written a number of books on Judaism, but none more important to this chapter than his exposé of the false charges that Pope Pius XII supported the Nazis.

**Nachum T. Gidal** (1909–96) was born in Germany and, being a Jew, left for Switzerland in 1933 and then settled in Jerusalem. He spent World War II working as a photojournalist for a British army publication. After the war, he came to the United States and, after a stint with *LIFE* magazine, joined the faculty of the New School for Social Research in New York City.

**Léon Poliakov** (1910–97) was a French historian, born in Russia to a Jewish family that moved to Italy. After World War II, he cofounded the Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation and assisted at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals. He is best known for a four-volume study of anti-Semitism.

**Peter Schäfer** is professor of Jewish Studies at Princeton University. After studying at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, he received his DPhil from the University of Freiberg. In 1994, he was awarded the Leibniz Prize, the most prestigious research prize in Germany. The author of several dozen books, in 1998 he accepted an appointment at Princeton.
official policy of any church or of any Christian state. Rather than actively seeking to eliminate Judaism, the ultimate luminous irony . . . is that Christian dogmatics entailed protecting Jews and Judaism from extinction. Although Christian civilization demeaned and debased Jews . . . the church, paradoxically, was committed to Jewish survival—until, that is, the collective repentance of the “Israel of the flesh” would usher in the Second Coming.74

Thus it is that the statement on the Jews issued by Vatican II in 1965 was nothing more (or less) than a forceful restatement of the traditional church teachings in language appropriate for the time.

Unfortunately, this particular manifestation of anti-Catholic history lives on with renewed venom in recent indictments of Pope Pius XII as Hitler’s collaborator in the Holocaust, which also is said to be quite in keeping with the pope’s support of Franco and the Spanish fascists. Ironically, this historical libel has mainly been propagated by alienated Catholics, while the most compelling support for the pope has come from Jews.

“Hitler’s Pope”

It seems to have been mostly forgotten that the campaign to link the pope to Hitler was initiated by the Soviet Union, presumably in hopes of neutralizing the Vatican in post–World War II affairs. Early in 1944, Izvestia (the official party daily published in Moscow) claimed that Pope Pius XII had supported the Nazi regime. The next day, the New York Times condemned the article as malicious propaganda and vigorously asserted the pope’s opposition to all forms of tyranny. But the Soviets continued, and one of their agents soon published a book claiming that the Vatican had signed a secret pact with Hitler.75 It was an obvious fake, embraced only by party-liners and by “professional” anti-Catholic writers—of whom there were a surprising number in that era. Fortunately,
the Soviet disinformation campaign was drowned out by a remarkable chorus of praise for the pope coming from Jewish sources in the immediate aftermath of World War II. As they noted, Hitler had bitterly attacked the Catholic Church, had closed all the Catholic schools, and had arrested thousands of priests and nuns and sent them to Dachau and other death camps.76

As the world learned of the horrors of the Nazi death camps, Pope Pius XII was widely praised for his vigorous and devoted efforts to saving Jewish lives during the war. In 1943, Chaim Weizmann, who would become the first president of Israel, wrote: “the Holy See is lending its powerful help wherever it can, to mitigate the fate of my persecuted co-religionists.”77 Moshe Sharett, soon to be Israel’s first foreign minister and second prime minister, met with the pope during the last days of the war: “I told him that my first duty was to thank him, and through him the Catholic Church, on behalf of the Jewish public for all they had done in various countries to rescue Jews.”78 Upon the pope’s death in 1958, Golda Meir, a future prime minister of Israel, noted his efforts on behalf of the Jews of Europe, calling him “a great servant of peace,”79 for it was well-known among that generation of Israelis that Pope Pius XII had made many personal efforts to protect and shelter Jews from the Nazis.

But then the anti-Catholic revisionism began. First came a play, The Deputy, written by a very left-wing German, Rolf Hochhuth. In it, Pope Pius XII was portrayed as an anti-Semite who was entirely indifferent to the Holocaust. Having opened to critical acclaim in Berlin in 1963, The Deputy opened in London later that year and had its Broadway debut in February 1964. Eventually it was translated into more than twenty languages, was made into a movie in 2002 (titled Amen), and had a London revival in 2006. The theatrical reviewers for the major daily papers in both Britain and the United States hailed the play,80 and Susan Sontag led the way for New York intellectuals: “The Deputy also stresses, and this is the controversial part of the play, a strong case for the complicity of the German Catholic Church and of Pope Pius XII. This case I am convinced
is true, and well taken. . . . And the importance, historical and moral, of
this difficult truth at the present time cannot be overestimated.”

Nevertheless, qualified historians rejected *The Deputy*. Writing from
Cambridge, Eamon Duffy testified that an examination of all pertinent
documents “decisively established the falsehood of Hochhuth’s specific
allegations.” Prominent Jews agreed. Joseph L. Lichten of the Anti-
Defamation League published a withering refutation of *The Deputy* and
its admirers. So did the Israeli diplomat Pinchas Lapide, who testified
that Pope Pius XII “was instrumental in saving at least 700,000, but
probably as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands.”

These claims and others reporting the pope’s efforts to save Jews were
confirmed by many others with deep knowledge of the Holocaust.

At this point, attacks on the pope as a Nazi accomplice seemed to
have been put to rest, although an occasional rumble still occurred in
extreme left-wing circles. But several years ago, it started all over again
with a spate of new books. Even though these books display remarkable
ignorance as well as self-indulgence, they mostly received very posi-
tive reviews in the popular press and sold very well, thus stimulating
and justifying a great deal of “informed” anti-Catholicism. As so often
happens, many qualified historians have written scathing reviews that
reveal the extreme biases and scholarly incompetence of these authors,
but these reviews have not been widely circulated.

The first major blast in this new assault was *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret
History of Pius XII* (1999) by John Cornwell. The primary thesis was that
Pope Pius XII negotiated a deal that helped the Nazis take over Ger-
many, thus condemning Europe’s Jews to the death camps. In keeping
with that thesis, the photograph on book’s dust jacket would seem to
show the soon-to-be Pope Pius XII visiting Nazi headquarters. What it
actually shows is him leaving a reception for the president of the We-
mar Republic in 1927. The pope never met Hitler and left Germany in
1929, well before the Nazis’ rise to power. The rest of the book consists
mainly of similar distortions and misstatements.

*Hitler’s Pope* sold very well, rising to fourteenth on the *New York Times*’
list of nonfiction bestsellers, and it received extended, favorable coverage on the TV show *60 Minutes*. That the author is a dropout from a Catholic seminary has been taken as evidence that he is not motivated by anti-Catholicism. But that ignores the fact that Cornwell has described himself as a “lapsed Catholic.” It also ignores subsequent evidence that Cornwell’s claims to having examined secret and incriminating documents in the Vatican Library were fraudulent. Finally, and most importantly, like most of the new attempts to link the pope to Hitler, Cornwell’s book is part of an effort by alienated Catholics to push the Church in very liberal directions. As explained by Rabbi David G. Dalin, “The Holocaust is simply the biggest club available for liberal Catholics to use against traditional Catholics in their attempt to bash the papacy and thereby to smash traditional Catholic teaching. . . . [These] polemics . . . of lapsed or angry liberal Catholics exploit the tragedy of the Jewish people during the Holocaust to foster their own political agenda.”

This description applies equally well to James Carroll, author of *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews—A History* (2001). Carroll is a novelist and an ex-priest, and both identities have shaped his book, which claims that the Christ story itself is the basis for unrelenting Christian anti-Semitism. As he put it, “Auschwitz is the climax of the story that begins at Golgotha. . . . Auschwitz, when seen in the links of causality, reveals that the hatred of Jews has been no incidental anomaly but a central action of Christian history. . . . Because the hatred of Jews had been made holy, it became lethal.” Carroll then devoted hundreds of pages to a distorted review of medieval materials already covered in this chapter and to excursions in theology: he dismisses the resurrection as harmful nonsense made up long after the fact and proposes that Christians can overcome their anti-Semitism only by rejecting the idea that Jesus was divine. The book also is crammed with Carroll’s obsessive reflections on his own private life (how his mother made him a priest) and his preferences (he likes Bob Dylan). Finally, after 495 pages,
Carroll’s book arrives at a discussion of Pius XII and Hitler, only to settle for an uninspired rehash of Cornwall’s *Hitler’s Pope*.

Carroll’s book also sold very well, was very positively reviewed in the popular press, and was highly praised by Garry Wills and Karen Armstrong. But the book was disdained by real scholars. Thus, the celebrated Protestant historian Robert Louis Wilken noted that although Carroll’s subtitle claims his book is a work of history, it is nothing of the sort, being “driven by theological animus” and based “almost wholly on the works of others.”90

In similar fashion, books by Gary Wills, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, Michael Phayer, and David Kertzer are angry rehashes of the same material in the same unscholarly ways. Finally, there is *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (2002) by Susan Zucotti. The author admits that when the Nazis attempted to round up and transport the Jews of Italy, at least 85 percent survived, most of them having been hidden in convents, monasteries, churches, and other Roman Catholic buildings, where many of them stayed until Allied troops arrived. But, according to Zucotti, this was done without any encouragement from Pius XII, who remained unmoved by the plight of the Jews. She advanced this view against the testimony of scores of clergy, monks, and nuns that their actions were prompted by the pope; Zucotti dismissed them as attempting to place the pope in a favorable light. She also dismissed the testimony of many Jews in favor of the pope as based on nothing but “benevolent ignorance,”91 and she chose to ignore well-known facts, such as that the pope himself used his summer home, Castel Gandolfo, to shelter thousands of Jews during the war, providing them with kosher food and turning his private apartment into an obstetrical ward.

But the whole truth is that Eugenio Pacelli spoke out against Hitler and racism during the 1930s, even before he became Pope Pius XII, and he continued to do so all through the war. In March 1935, he sent an “open letter” to the bishop of Cologne in which he called the Nazis
“false prophets with the pride of Lucifer.” In 1937, during a sermon at Notre Dame in Paris, he identified Germany as “that noble and powerful nation whom bad shepherds would lead astray into an ideology of race.”

Consider these headlines in the *New York Times*:

- **October 28, 1939:** “Pope Condemns Dictators, Treaty Violators, Racism.”
- **August 6, 1942:** “Pope Is Said to Plead for Jews Listed for Removal from France.”
- **August 27, 1942:** “Vichy Seizes Jews; Pope Pius Ignored.”

And, on December 26, 1941, the *New York Times* editorialized: “The voice of Pius XII is a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe this Christmas. . . . In calling for a ‘real new order’ based on ‘liberty, justice, and love,’ . . . the pope put himself squarely against Hitlerism.”

If more evidence is needed, dozens of prominent Jews have spoken out to thank the pope for his vigorous efforts to avert the Holocaust and for his personal and relatively successful efforts to save the Jews of Italy. Although it goes unmentioned in the new attacks on the pope, Hitler was so angered that in 1942 the German Ministry of Propaganda put out ten million copies of a pamphlet identifying Pius XII as the “pro-Jewish pope,” and the next year Hitler tried to have the pope kidnapped.

Finally, a radio message from Nazi headquarters in Rome to Berlin, sent ten days after the attempted roundup of the Italian Jews, and intercepted by the Allies on October 26, 1943, reads: “Vatican has apparently for a long time been assisting many Jews to escape.”

**Conclusion**

It is quite true that for centuries the Catholic Church condoned an ugly array of anti-Semitic beliefs and participated in various forms of discrimination against Jews (as did the Protestants when they arrived upon the scene). This unpleasant fact gives plausibility to the charges that
the Church also was deeply implicated in the pogroms that began in medieval times and culminated in the Holocaust. However, much that is plausible is not true, and in this instance it is not. The Roman Catholic Church has a long and honorable record of stout opposition to attacks upon Jews. And Pope Pius XII fully lived up to that tradition.