Symposium Review

Justus George Lawler, *Were the Popes Against the Jews? Tracking the Myths, Confronting the Ideologues* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012)

Summary Review

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In *Popes and Politics: Reform, Resentment and the Holocaust* (2002) Justus George Lawler noted the “accidental” nature of the book. It was not a book he “planned on writing.”¹ It was a book that marked a departure from previous published work, as its immediate predecessors were works of literary criticism. And yet, the skills of a close reader of literary texts, particularly when those are reinforced and augmented by years of experience as an editor evaluating manuscripts, provide the link with *Popes and Politics* and now with *Were the Popes Against the Jews: Tracking the Myths, Confronting the Ideologies*. In reading works concerned with the papacy and its role in the modern world, and particularly with its relationship with the Jews, he found “certain traits common in a greater or lesser degree to all of them.”² A stridency of tone, vehement condemnation of whatever a given author wanted to oppose, were compounded by errors of fact and errors of interpretation. In major part *Popes and Politics* represents a work of rectification.

That effort is renewed in *Were the Popes Against the Jews*. Unlike the earlier book which engaged a variety of authors, ranging among ideological consecrators of the papacy, its ideological denigrators and, “as professional advocates of objectivity and independence [who] must appear to be above the fray,” historians,³ this one focuses on a single work: David Kertzer’s *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican’s Role in*

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². Ibid., 15.
³. Ibid., 37-41.
the Rise of Anti-Semitism. Like Popes and Politics, however, the current book also engages issues of church governance, gender conflicts, sexual morality, signs of the times, and doctrinal claims.

Lawler’s initially favorable impression of Kertzer’s book changed with closer scrutiny; “inaccurate translations, waffled data, and even doctored texts” transformed “original acceptance into accelerating disapproval.” The perpetuation of these errors by reviewers who accepted Kertzer’s claims, compounded by reviewers of these reviewers, motivated an extended critique. Since Kertzer maintained that modern anti-Semitism began in the 1860s, Lawler decided to begin his study with Pope Pius IX, omitting Kertzer’s background material and reducing the number of popes at issue from nine to five: Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, and Pius XI. This abridged chronological span coincides with challenges posed to the institutional church as it had to cope with “unprecedented obstacles in the most crucial phase of its history since the Reformation.” This reference to the church as institution is significant to Lawler’s argument, as he will judge Kertzer’s focus on individual popes decontextualized from their institutional setting a serious failing.

The subtitle of Kertzer’s book, The Vatican’s Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism, does not, to Lawler’s mind, adequately represent its author’s thesis: “its thesis is not that the Vatican played a role in the rise of modern anti-Semitism, but that it was ‘crucial’ to its rise.” Since “the Vatican” becomes implicitly interchangeable with “the pope,” it allows anti-Semitism to be attributed not to a relatively abstract entity, but to the person of each pope himself.

The first instance of this strategy occurs in Kertzer’s examination of the Vatican controlled (and, farther afield, inspired) press. The popes are held responsible for the anti-Semitic campaigns conducted in the church press, most notably in La Civiltà cattolica and L’Osservatore romano, over which the popes exercised control. In essence, the papal press expressed publicly the mind of the pope. It is a failing (even among Catholics at times) to attribute a monolithic character to the Vatican. Such a characterization will not, as in this instance, stand up to the facts. Kertzer’s account is

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4. David I. Kertzer, The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican’s Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001). With a 2001 publication date Kertzer’s book was remarked in Popes and Politics, where it received favorable mention from Lawler. In Were the Popes Against the Jews he explains: “The obvious reason for this favorable opinion was simply that few people in the twenty-first century would deny that not only the popes but most of the Christian tradition had been ‘against the Jews,’ a fact made quite clear by the conventional term used among historians and theologians, adversus Iudaos. That term defined a unique genre of writing and a unique way of thinking about Jews which, from the fifth century and for more than a millennium after, had characterized both Christian theology and popular Christian sentiment” (ix).

5. Justus George Lawler, Were the Popes Against the Jews, xi.

6. Effectively, this means that Lawler begins his treatment with Part II of The Popes Against the Jews.

7. Lawler, Were the Popes Against the Jews, x.

8. Ibid., xii. “Kertzer’s final chapter makes it abundantly clear that he has been writing about the church and the uniquely modern form of contempt for Jews known as exterminationist anti-Semitism, since the chapter title explicitly refers to the papacy and the Vatican as the ‘Antechamber to the Holocaust’” (xii).
faulted for its failure to take into account instances of disagreements between the Vatican and the Civiltà on political and doctrinal matters during the final years of Leo XIII into the papacy of Benedict XV, or factions among the Jesuit editors of the publication. Nor is it enough, Lawler argues, to note the presence of anti-Semitic articles in the Civiltà and then conclude that the papacy was the cause. Or, by extension, that the Civiltà in responding to papal initiative played a crucial role in extending a papal animus toward the Jews to a wider Catholic public. “The chronology indicates that it is just as likely that those particular Jesuits who wrote the anti-Jewish articles were themselves responding to an already existing surge of racial animus.”

In the case of France (which Kertzer treats in chapter 8 of his book) the evidence more than suggests that Catholics are responding to, reinforcing, and extending waves of popular anti-Semitism that were catalyzed by economic, political, and social tensions—rather than constituting an initiating force under the influence of Vatican exemplars.

There are several myths that relate to specific popes. Lawler concentrates mainly on four that are most frequently cited by reviewers: (1) Pius IX’s and Leo XIII’s public display of their anti-Semitism in their referring to Jews and Judaism in official documents as the “synagogue of Satan”; (2) Pius IX’s reference to Jews as dangerous “dogs” who were bothering the Christian citizens of Rome; (3) issues surrounding the accusation of the “blood libel” that Jews killed Christian children for use in religious rituals; and (4) that the future Pius XI embraced advocates of the extermination of Jews.

Mythologization in the first two instances rests on insufficient attention paid to context. “Synagogue of Satan” has a long and interesting history of use in Christianity, being applied at times to the Church of Rome, to Tractarians, later to Nazism, and to Bolsheviks, atheists and free thinkers—as well as to Jews. Specifically, with reference to Pius IX and Leo XIII, it referred to the array of conspiratorial forces arrayed against Catholicism, most notably to Freemasonry. While Jewish membership in Masonry facilitated a transition from the “Masonic conspiracy” to the “Jewish-Masonic conspiracy,” the term “synagogue of Satan” functioned basically as an epithet for whatever was regarded as a consummate evil. In short, the conjunction of “synagogue” and “Satan” does not automatically signal anti-Semitism. Pius IX’s reference to “dogs” likewise emerges within a context—in this case the reference is to Matthew 15.21-28, as Lawler’s restoration of the actual text of the pope’s remarks makes clear. Understanding the scriptural parallel that the pope is attempting to draw leads to a very different conclusion than the anti-Semitic construction placed upon the pope’s discourse by Kertzer: “Just as the disciples thought the Canaanite woman bothersome—so the pope thought the Republican partisans and the Jews were also. But to the degree that the focus is on the Jews, then the final implication of the pope’s talk is that even as Jesus ended up welcoming the woman, so too would Pius welcome the Jews.”

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9. Ibid., 27n., 28.
10. Ibid., 31. Cf. 60.
11. Ibid., 50-51.
12. Ibid., 85.
Issues surrounding the imputation of ritual murder to Jews are treated more extensively by Kertzer, who gives three instances in his chapter, “Ritual Murder and the Popes in the Twentieth Century”: (i) concerns two letters over the signature of Leo XIII’s secretary of state, Cardinal Rampolla, which are viewed as giving approval to Henri Desportes, a French priest “clearly obsessed with ritual murder”; (ii) a decree of the Holy Office which rejected the credibility of the opinion that ritual murders had never occurred; and (iii) most importantly, the trial for ritual murder in Kiev where, again in Kertzer’s view, the papal secretary of state—and hence the pope himself—refused to aid the Jew who was accused of the murder.13

As an endorsement of ritual murder, the first instance rests on the assumption that a book and its accompanying letter sent by an obscure French priest would have actually come to the attention of the cardinal secretary of state, who then would have shared it with the pope, and subsequently issued a letter that represents a considered judgment of the book’s contents—rather than a form letter response dispensed by a bureaucratic underling according to accepted protocol for dealing with such instances. It further rests on an interpretation of the Vatican’s brief message that “expands [its] scope and import . . . so that, finally, it elides into an endorsement of ritual murder. . . .”14 Finally, the presence of ritual murder stories appearing in the Civiltà cattolica during this same period is given as additional evidence of alignment of pope and secretary of state in accepting and encouraging credence in this issue.

The second instance was catalyzed by two letters sent to the secretary of state in 1899. Cardinal Herbert Vaughan and the Duke of Norfolk wrote independently, requesting that the Holy See “reiterate the repudiations of the ritual murder charge that, they said, popes in earlier centuries had often issued.”15 The request fell under the competence of the Holy Office and was accordingly referred to it. In its declaration that body stated that it was not possible to give an affirmative response to the request. Among the problematic aspects of Kertzer’s treatment of this declaration are his rendering of the Holy Office’s text and his framing of the incident, especially in relation to Leo XIII. Once again, Lawler finds a monolithic view of the Vatican making an appearance. “At no time is the possibility entertained that there are other influential agencies and personalities involved either directly or as necessary auxiliaries in statements or deeds by the papacy”16—an observation that applies to the earlier instance involving Desportes.

Lawler devotes a separate chapter to the Kiev trial that occurred in 1913, under the papacy of Pius X. Briefly, Vatican involvement turns on a request to have official authentication of two papal statements denouncing the blood libel. Vatican testimony was judged to be useful because a key defender of ritual murder was to be a defrocked

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13. Ibid., 102.
15. Kertzer is quoted, ibid., 111.
16. Ibid., 118. Lawler continues, “All this stands in contrast to the more ample vision of personalities and events evidenced by Owen Chadwick”—and goes on to cite instances (119).
Catholic priest. Lawler is able to show that Kertzer suppresses key information from his sources that is detrimental to his thesis, omits crucial chronology that would undercut his argument—with the overall effect of discrediting Merry Del Val, the secretary of state and, by implication, the reigning pope. In short, “this case is the clearest and the most brazen instance of texts being intentionally manipulated and truncated as well as of facts being distorted or concealed in order to prove that the popes were engaged in unholy war against the Jews.”

Benedict XV’s papacy was dominated by the First World War and thus he does not occupy any great place in this narrative. Hence attention is directed to the fourth of the main myths that Lawler deconstructs, that which concerns Achille Ratti, the future Pius XI, stemming from his time as Apostolic Visitor in Poland. The first difficulty that emerges from Kertzer’s exposition is the recurring one of substituting correlation for connection. He is able to cite excerpts from various documents and reports on anti-Semitism, but does not show a convincing connection between the documents and Ratti’s own reports written over the course of his visit. A noteworthy example occurs in Kertzer’s reference to the anti-Semitic writings of a Polish priest, Józef Kruszyński, a believer in Jewish world conspiracy who advocated extermination of the Jews as the solution to the “Jewish scourge.” Kruszyński’s writings are used as emblematic of Polish anti-Semitism, but no direct connection to Ratti is shown. Nor could it be, as the priest’s statement was made “after Achille Ratti had left Poland and had, in fact, been reigning as Pope Pius XI for nearly two years.” Moreover, Kertzer fails to appreciate that “extermination” must be understood in the context of the fringe social Darwinist perspective of the day. As other scholars have demonstrated, the term refers to de-Judaization of the country, a territorial solution rather than actual elimination. Kertzer finds additional support for the claim that the period spent in Poland was significant for the formation of the future pope’s attitude toward Jews of central and eastern Europe in Ratti’s final report to Rome. Here again Lawler finds manipulation of the language and structure of the original text in service of ideological perspective.

Kertzer’s final chapter is entitled “Antechamber to the Holocaust.” It makes clear that the popes are given a major share in the responsibility, not only for the rise of racialist anti-Semitism, but for its practical consequences. Italy becomes the focus, as the Vatican’s role “in the development of the policies of discrimination and harassment that set the stage for the Holocaust are most clearly on display in those places

17. Ibid., 124. On page 144 Lawler provides a summary of techniques representing bias that figure in the representation of the Beilis trial.
18. What statements Benedict did make with regard to the Jews were regarded in a positive light. Cf. 149-50.
19. Ibid., 171.
20. Ibid., 172.
21. Ibid., 175.
22. Ibid., 162-64. In the course of his critique of materials relating to Ratti, Lawler finds concealment of specific dates (172), fudging sources (175-77), tampering with texts (180), and misreading (182).
where the Church’s influence was greatest.”23 Among the topics discussed by Kertzer and critically examined by Lawler are the Vatican condemnation of the Friends of Israel—providing the setting for further attribution of anti-Semitism to Pius XI; placement of the pope’s statement, “Spiritually we are all Semites” in the context of his Polish experience; and the waves of racial laws promulgated by the Fascist regime for which the church is held to have provided the groundwork and to which the church responded by silence. Close reading of documents and chronology reveals many of the same shortcomings detected earlier.

In a summary statement, Lawler characterizes Kertzer’s book as “a remarkable achievement in weaving together, from a multitude of varying strands, a whole-cloth conspiracy against Jews perpetrated by the elders of the Vatican.”24 Studies of conspiracy theory have shown that underlying the identity of the particular culprit(s)—be they Jesuits, Masons, Jews, or whomever—there tends to be a common dynamic. Such theories find fertile ground in times of crisis, economic, political, or social, and look to assign responsibility directly to conscious human agency rather than impersonal forces in the market, in governance, or in society. At several point in his critique Lawler is able to raise the question, does the evidence point more strongly to a conscious campaign waged by a series of popes who were anti-Semitic in thought, word, and deed? Or does it rather support waves of anti-Semitism in which people are responding to economic crisis such as the Panama Scandal, or politically charged situations such as the Dreyfus Affair?

If the role assigned to the papacy by Kertzer in the construction of the road to the Holocaust is questionable, what of the papacy’s potential for placing a roadblock on that route? In his penultimate chapter Lawler broaches the question of “whether it is possible to really believe that any statement of any pope, no matter how vigorously and repeatedly proclaimed, could in fact have had any deterrent effect on Hitler’s vicious plot for the Jews of Europe.”25 After affirming the difficulty of sustaining “an affirmative answer to that question,”26 he engages the work of Catholic writers who make a case for an affirmative answer, notably John Cornwell, and Beth Greiche-Polelle.

Structural explanations of events are not meant to elide human agency from consideration, but they can and do set limits on human action. Hence the inclusion of both “ideals” and “institutions” in the title of the final chapter in Were the Popes Against the Jews. And the suggestion that, beyond the correction of ideological history present in The Popes Against the Jews, examination of it “can lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of religious institutions as such.”27

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23. Kertzer, 265.
24. Lawler, Were the Popes Against the Jews, 226.
25. Ibid., 237.
26. Ibid., 237-38. “The overall conclusion of Popes and Politics was that there was probably little that either leader, Pacelli or Ben-Gurion, could have done to disrupt or prevent the Nazi murders” (359n.).
27. Ibid., 297.
In brief, Lawler challenges Kertzer’s finding the key to interpretation of past events in the interpretation of papal personality, without giving due attention to the necessarily conservative socio-religious structure of papacy and institutional church. The church shares with other institutions founded on noble principles a commitment to a traditional heritage that is challenged by novel political, social, and religious phenomena that appear to threaten the stability of institutional well-being. How can past and future be reconciled without occluding or abandoning its foundational principles? Lawler examines the government of the United States, specifically with reference to Lincoln and the issue of slavery, and the State of Israel with regard to the status of Palestinians in the “territories.”

He does so, not with the intent to justify the conduct of church and popes, but to underscore “the importance of taking into account the nature of institutions, their benefits and their liabilities, before attributing every appalling act done in the name of religion to the evil will of evil men.”

In short, through retrieval of sources, by reinserting statements into their original documentary contexts, and placing documents in their chronological and cultural contexts, Lawler exposes factual and interpretive fallacies in Kertzer’s arguments. The critique of *The Popes Against the Jews* goes beyond documentary criticism and historical fact-checking to engage sociocultural analysis—the constraints institutions impose upon their incumbents, and the social settings of discourse, with resultant implications for human agency. Lawler makes a compelling case for a much more plausible reading of the historical record than that offered by Kertzer.

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28. Retrieval of the tension between adherence to foundational principles and assimilation of change provides the occasion for discussion of various neuralgic issues confronting the church at present. The challenge engages overcoming the limitations of institutional leaders as well as limitations of the institution itself.

Individual Reviews

Paula Kane

It is hard to ask the question “Were the Popes against the Jews?,” especially after seeing the inspiring film, “Of Gods and Men” (2010). The story is based upon actual events in the lives of eight French Cistercian Trappist monks in Algeria in the 1990s who decided to risk capture at the hands of extremist Muslims during that nation’s civil war, rather than abandon the local population whom they served with compassion and tenderness. The monks’ awareness that their choice to stay and be captured virtually guaranteed them death is all the more poignant in contrast to the apparent unresponsiveness of the Vatican in similarly challenging circumstances during World War II. Milder critics of the papacy have charged the pope with nothing worse than bureaucratic inertia, opting to defend the institution at all costs by doing little to aid others, even if it meant sacrificing the lives of Jews. Others have described the strategy of Pius XII and his predecessor as “reticent neutrality,” which allowed them to work in secret to aid the Jews or through diplomatic channels to end the war. Still others have judged the popes as callously indifferent to the plight of European Jews, as conditioned by centuries of Catholic anti-semitism. In any case, the issue of the Vatican’s role in defending Jews has been ignited again in light of the beatification of Pope Pius IX in 2000, and of the campaign to beatify Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli), who served as pope from 1939 to 1958. (Pacelli, although he never met Adolf Hitler, lived in Germany while serving as papal nuncio there from 1930 to 1939.) Perhaps the best recent summary of him comes from Susan Zuccotti in her discussion of the treatment of Italian Jews by the Vatican: “Clearly, papal involvement in Jewish rescue is not a black-or-white issue, but one of painfully nuanced shades of grey. Pius XII was a conscientious, deeply spiritual man, perhaps somewhat out of touch with reality and perhaps unable to comprehend fully the horrors of his age.”

Why continue to ask in 2012, if the popes were against the Jews? What possible outcomes can be expected from this question, given the limitations of evidence that

prevents access to materials in the Vatican Archives after 1922? Two thoughts came
to mind as I reviewed Lawler’s book. First, it remains a hard, but necessary, question
to ask, especially if Jewish-Christian dialogue is to succeed. Second, the hotly-con-
tested and volatile question about the role played by Pope Pius XII during the
Holocaust will not be answered by one book. To the contrary, the several dozen
monographs that exist by now have exposed the “shades of grey” that have prolonged
the debate.

As an American historian, I make no claim to expertise on the history of the
Shoah, the papacy, European history, or the Second World War. Still, I was sur-
prised upon surveying my bookshelves, that I had at least some acquaintance with
scholarship on the Holocaust and the Catholic Church and on the broader topic of
Catholic anti-semitism. My brief list includes James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*
(2000); Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*; Derek Hastings, *Catholicism
and the Roots of Nazism* (2010); John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the
Holocaust Happened in Germany*; Garry Wills, *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*
(2000); and Susan Zuccotti, *Under his Very Windows* (2002). My first introduc-
tion to the topic was Guenter Lewy’s *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*
(1967), which I discovered in graduate school. As *Were the Popes against the
Jews?* amply illustrates in its footnotes and discussion, hundreds of additional
books and oceans of periodical literature have appeared in the intervening
decades. Much of this scholarship is surveyed with admirable neutrality in José
M. Sanchez, *Pius XII and the Holocaust* (2002). On the origins of fascism, I
would recommend to Catholic readers Zeev Sternhell’s *Neither Right nor Left:
Fascist Ideology in France* (1986), and on historical anti-semitism, where my
bibliography leans toward the medieval and early modern period, I have learned
much about the origins of Catholic accusations against Jews for blood libel, host
desecration and ritual murder from Jeremy Cohen, Sander Gilman, Gavin
Langmuir, David Nirenberg and Miri Rubin. None of these dabblings, however,
makes me an authority on Jewish history or of anti-semitism. Further, I can claim
no expertise on the relationship between the modern papacy and its actions during
the fascist era and Second World War, so it is with great hesitation that I enter into
this fray. Even among American Catholic historians I suspect that I am not alone
in pleading relative ignorance of the contents of “We Remember: A Reflection on
the Shoah,” issued by the Catholic Commission for Religious Relations with the
Jews in 1998, and of the ensuing debates. In his *History, Religion and Anti-semi-
tism* (1990), Gavin Langmuir posed the excellent question: how can historians be
objective about the religions of others? That appears to be the relevant issue here
as well.

Justus George Lawler adds his voice to the Pius wars in a lengthy tome of ten
chapters, by means of an unfolding set of reviews of recent books that he describes
as “self-serving polemics” on the relationship between modern popes and the Jews.
He concentrates his efforts mostly on refuting one ten-year old study, David Kertzer’s
*The Popes against the Jews* (2001), (and to some degree, John Cornwell’s *Hitler’s
Pope, 1999) ostensibly to correct factual errors, mistranslations, and faulty arguments (xiv).

Despite his noble goal of rescuing dead popes from historical error, Lawler’s writing style does him no favors: the pages and examples unfold in a roundabout manner, making the thread of an argument hard to find and follow, given the many digressions and diversions, attacks on authors and rebuttals to points made in other books. In addition, Lawler is too easily infuriated by the advertising hype of the publishing industry, such as that proclaiming Kertzer as “America’s foremost expert on the modern history of the Vatican’s relations with the Jews” (xii). Kertzer has enjoyed ten of his fifteen minutes of fame, but we are not obliged to believe everything that is said of him (or about Daniel Goldhagen or John Cornwell), and so it is difficult to share Lawler’s outrage with the hyperbole of trade publishing. Lawler’s voice among the works he cites and critiques is a crusty, quixotic one, absorbed with correcting errors from a defensive position, and endorsing a mixture of liberal and anti-liberal positions which are at odds with each other (262). A catalog of presumed “gotcha” moments and papal intrigues that tries to discern who knew what and when, do not add up to much in the way of an overall argument about the papacy in the fascist era. For post-Cold War Catholics, an obsessive defense of the pope no longer seems necessary or even possible, given the unflattering revelations of the clerical sexual abuse scandal during the last decade. Thus, attacks on the reputation of several dead popes are hardly likely to inspire a new crusading mentality. Where Lawler faults the profession of history for succumbing to the temptation to pile blame on Pius XII, I find evidence to the contrary that a new generation of historians of eastern and western Europe are producing vigorous scholarship that scrutinizes how religious ideologies, whether Christian or neo-pagan, were one factor among many that contributed to the Third Reich and its Final Solution, and that while Catholic anti-semitism cannot be regarded as the sole or leading cause for the extermination of six million Jews, it had a role in shaping entire cultures in western Europe for over 1500 years.

Let me focus my remarks on the final three chapters (8-10) in Lawler’s book. Here Lawler combs through recent publications by Cornwell, Katz, Kertzer, Phayer, and Zuccotti to condemn their errors, especially Kertzer’s “whole-cloth conspiracy against Jews perpetrated by the elders of the Vatican” (226). The glacial pace of change at the Vatican is already acknowledged by Catholics. Nevertheless, as Lawler correctly points out, the Catholic Church’s dramatic change of mind about Judaism and the Jews in response to “modern racist anti-semitism can be recognized as one of the most dramatic response to the signs of the times in the history of Christianity.” The recognition that the Catholic Church revised its former thinking and liturgical prayers to recognize that Jews, also, serve God, is evidence of transformation that

2. Kertzer, a professor of history at Brown University, is also author of The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara, a study of an infamous baptism of a Jewish child in Italy who was seized from his family in 1856, which became an object lesson from the papacy of Pius IX of how not to treat the Jews.
perhaps bears emphasizing for Jewish historians who are too quick to lapse into condemnations of the Church. By not moving chronologically beyond the Holocaust or the formation of the state of Israel, Jewish historians in this mold are less likely to change their own views about the Catholic Church despite evidence of its increasing goodwill toward Jews. Still, the pace of the Church’s progress toward reconciliation with Jews remains uneven. Two reasons that the “We Remember” statement was disappointing to some Jewish commentators were that it missed an opportunity to definitively apologize to Jews, and it was silent about the behavior of Pius XII. The Vatican could improve its status dramatically by apologizing for the past, which it cannot change, before addressing the present and future, and the lack of such an apology remains a point dividing Catholics and Jews.

In the latter chapters of his book Lawler seems to assume that historians and researchers are only worthwhile when they stand outside politics, or remain immersed in “their very own turf wars” (253). In Chapter 9, Lawler’s main criticisms, moreover, seem to be directed at academics themselves, as though they were the problem in the ongoing debate on the Vatican’s role in aiding Jews during the Holocaust. For most of his book, Lawler objects to “liberal Catholic academics,” whom he regards as being reflexively politically correct, by which he means always taking the part of the Jews-as-victims, and refusing to defend the Catholic Church and Catholic leaders against charges of anti-semitism. He discerns a “liberal certitude” among “lockstepping liberals” that makes them “smug” about their historical correctness, when in fact Lawler’s debate is really with the several historians (Catholic and otherwise) who have cherry-picked their citations to shed the most unflattering light on the popes or the Catholic Church. Also caught in Lawler’s dragnet here are the “bloggers at ‘dotCommonweal,” and others responding to John Connelly’s open letter to Pope Benedict XVI, signed by those self-same liberals, requesting a postponement of activities surrounding the beatification of Pius XII. My sense of Lawler’s frustration is that he may not fully appreciate the complexity of academic disciplines, conferences, and publishing. Despite his conspiratorial fantasies, complete unanimity on any historical issue among scholars is rare, and there are still robust differences between history books marketed to the public and those published by academic presses, which manifest themselves in the quality of the research and documentation. It is not news to academics that Cornwell’s study of Hitler’s Pope is often careless and overly partisan, for instance, and that Phayer’s conclusions about Nazi Germany are reasonable and nuanced because they are defensible from his sources.

In Chapter 10, Lawler introduces a grab bag of topics from American, Polish, and Israeli history. As the author admits, “the final chapter may come a considerable distance from the conciliar texts that initiated this discussion.” (336) Presumably Lawler chose his examples to illustrate Peter Berger’s sociological theme that institutions lose sight of their lofty goals and get bogged down by inertia (xvii). The hopeful point, seemingly, is that while the Catholic Church has been wrong on numerous moral issues in the past, it can still reform itself based upon its foundational (Gospel)
principles. To illustrate how the Church failed as an institution, Lawler compares it with “two other contemporary institutions that also have moral values, traditional roots, and present-day socio-political implications”—the American government and the state of Israel (302). His optimistic claim that both of them “manage to survive with their essential missions relatively intact” is highly debatable, especially in this year of divisive political conflict in both nations precisely about what constitutes “core values.” Americans have hardly lived up to the notion of the equality of all citizens, and the Israeli state’s oppression of Palestinians is not admirable either.

Lawler’s point is made by way of drawing a parallel between President Abraham Lincoln’s choice to preserve the Union rather than destroy slavery and the papacy’s assumed choice to serve some higher good by not protesting the Holocaust more forcefully. However it is not made clear why Lawler regards Lincoln’s attitude toward American slavery in a contest to save the nation as a constitutional construct, as comparable to papal maneuvering to preserve the Vatican, or why a long digression on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is inserted here. In the end, it’s a long road to a small house for Lawler to accuse all the scholars discussed herein of “privileging” anything “done in the name of anti-anti-semitism” (271).

Lawler’s final chapter also engages contemporary Catholic issues, to which I turn now. His initial premise from Leopold von Ranke is questionable, that the work of historians is about writing history “as it really was.” These days no one accepts von Ranke’s aphorism as a how-to guide, and Lawler’s corollary project (deriving “some kind of practical reformative consequences” from a critique of authors like Kertzer) is not exactly historical either. Although Lawler’s expressed views about the Catholic Church’s shortcomings in contemporary moral theology and gender align him with religious progressives on most issues (rejecting the faulty reasoning of *Humanae Vitae*, favoring women’s ordination, advocating better treatment of gays, demanding transparency in light of revelations of clerical sexual abuse, etc.), the discussion here, which returns to critiquing Kertzer’s book, does not finally reveal Lawler’s position or advance the debate on Pius XII’s reputation. Lawler returns to the assumption, missed by Kertzer in his view, that that papacy is a “necessarily conservative socio-religious structure” (298), which therefore must prevent us from reducing the popes to their personal antagonism toward Jews (300). This sounds like a rationalization to avoid making the popes accountable for what they did and failed to do. Throughout the book the relationship between individuals and culture is not problematized adequately: it would be important to know how Lawler understands Pius XII as a product of his own Italian culture and of a European tradition that included Catholic anti-semitism, as well as an individual who possessed an individual conscience (Lawler frequently cites Cardinal Newman on this point) that could direct him to reject the *habitus* that shaped him.

Lawler’s opinions on current debates among Catholics over women’s issues, sexual identity and expression, are more concurrent with progressive Catholic opinion on these matters, but need to be more fully integrated to an understanding of Catholic anti-semitism. He seems to suggest that the Catholic Church has been wrong
in the past, so why not these issues as well? It is hard to discern Lawler’s precise position about Catholic anti-semitism during the fascist era and after, and what he adds to the already extensive scholarly debate. After recriminatory swipes at dozens of historians, Lawler concludes his book with some advice for Judaism, in its role as “spiritual custodian of Western humanism,” to recover its “noblest foundational ideals.” At the end he has wandered far afield from examining Catholic policies directed at the Jews during the Holocaust to internal fights among Israelis about the treatment of Palestinians. We won’t advance historical knowledge about Catholic involvement in the Holocaust by presenting evidence that the Jews, also, have treated others badly. It might be a good time to see “Of Gods and Men” again to remind ourselves that righteous decisions are costly, but possible.
William L Portier

David I. Kertzer begins *The Popes Against the Jews, The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (2001) with “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” released March 16, 1998 by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Jews. “When I read the news story of the Vatican press conference, and later read the text of the Commission report,” Kertzer writes in his Introduction, “I knew there was something terribly wrong with the history the Vatican was recounting. It is a history that many wished had happened, but it is not what actually happened. It is the later story . . . that I try to tell in the pages that follow” (4). Justus George Lawler contests Kertzer’s claim to tell the story of “what actually happened” and denies him the moral high ground from which he appears to speak. *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* demonstrates that, by means of “doctored texts, waffled data, and inaccurate translations” (xii), Kertzer has violated the historian’s fundamental responsibility to be faithful to the sources. Drawing on long experience as editor, author, and professor of literature, Lawler backs up his shocking charges with painstaking *explication de texte*. His book’s subtitle, *Tracking the Myths, Confronting the Ideologues*, signals its organization.

Tracking the Myths

Part Two of Kertzer’s book, “The Church and the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism,” argues that rabidly anti-Semitic articles in the pages of *Civiltà Cattolica*, from 1870 until Pope Benedict XV put a stop to them early in the twentieth century, gave rise to modern anti-Semitism and that Pius IX and Leo XIII were ultimately responsible. Lawler devotes the first seven of his ten chapters to addressing these claims. At the beginning of Chapter 5, he summarizes what he takes to be Kertzer’s thesis: “out of the limelight and with the assistance of their secretaries of state, the popes regulated the anti-Semitic campaigns conducted in the church press” (96-97). Thus, no church, no papacy, no Holocaust as the central “myth” against which Lawler contends.

The *Civiltà* articles Kertzer cites at length are shameful, appalling, and indefensible. That they were written by Catholic priests is a scandal. Lawler calls the culture of anti-Judaism from which these articles emanated “the blight on the entire tradition” (98). But he questions whether they were “crucial” to the rise of modern anti-Semitism and whether conspiratorial popes pulled the strings.
Lawler identifies four sub-myths in Kertzer’s case for the papacy’s key role in the Holocaust. 1) Both Pius IX and Leo XIII referred to Jewish places of worship as “synagogues of Satan.” 2) Pius IX called Jews “dogs.” 3) Both Pius IX and Leo XIII fostered the “blood libel” (the charge, absurd to anyone with only cursory familiarity with Mosaic Law, that Jews required ritual murder to get blood for their worship) and prevented Jews falsely accused of ritual murders from being exonerated. 4) As apostolic visitor and then nuncio to Poland from 1918-1921, the future Pope Pius XI imbibed anti-Semitism and embraced those who advocated exterminating the Jews. Lawler distinguishes honest from dishonest mistakes, the latter, ideologically driven, serve to enhance the author’s argument. He finds most of Kertzer’s mistakes dishonest. In general, he faults Kertzer for de-contextualizing and then psychologizing these modern popes, attributing to them motives of hateful anti-Semitism.

Lawler re-locates the modern popes as complex historical actors. In the first two cases, he provides the contexts for “synagogue of Satan” and “dogs.” In the first case, “synagogue of Satan” is derived from Rev. 2.9: “I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan.” Kertzer either ignored or did not read this passage. In the second case, Pius’s remark is set in the context of a sermon on Mt 15.21-28 where the Canaanite woman, a gentile, asks Jesus for the metaphorical bread thrown to dogs. Kertzer fails to provide the text of the sermon. Lawler calls these the “two most unwarranted slanders” associated with Pius IX (67-68). While both of these speech acts would likely offend contemporary Jewish or Christian ears, neither is, in context, an expression of anti-Semitic hatred.

In both of the next two cases, Lawler shows that Kertzer has distorted the texts on which he relies. Lawler calls the charge that Pius X allegedly withheld evidence that would have helped save Mendel Beilis from a 1913 charge of ritual murder “the clearest and most brazen instance of texts being intentionally manipulated and truncated as well as of facts being distorted or concealed in order to prove that the popes were engaged in unholy war against the Jews” (124). At one point (129-31), Lawler finds Kertzer paraphrasing his source “word for word.” Lawler juxtaposes “Szajkowski writes” and “Kertzer writes.” He then provides in the text a copy of the entire page from which the quotations are taken in Zosa Szajkowski’s “The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe,” Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 31 (1963). The passages Lawler cites from Kertzer appear on pp. 230-31 of The Popes Against the Jews. Unfortunately, in a book whose arguments rely heavily on the accuracy and completeness of quotations, either Lawler or the Eerdmans editors have decided not to include page numbers in the book’s citations. In the matter of the future Pius XI in Poland, Lawler charges Kertzer with “the most blatant distortion of a pope’s words in the entire book,” tampering with Achille Ratti’s (future Pius XI) final report from Poland to the Vatican (178).

Will Kertzer use his next announced book on Pius XI, The Pope and Mussolini (236), to answer Lawler’s analysis of his book’s “dishonest mistakes”? Stay tuned. In the meantime, readers will want to see for themselves Lawler’s spectacular findings. Much ink could be spent disputing the four cases mentioned above, but the remain-
der of this essay will focus on the second part of the subtitle, *Confronting the Ideologues* and the last three of Lawler’s ten chapters. Kertzer is Lawler’s ideologue in chief, but his Catholic counterparts are legion. Lawler likens Kertzer’s book, driven by an “ideological anti-papal agenda” (49), to ante-Bellum nineteenth-century Maria Monk literature in the United States.

**Confronting the Ideologues**

For Lawler Ideology helps explain why an otherwise responsible historian might engage in the practices with which he has charged Kertzer, and why Kertzer’s Catholic allies among “Holocaust professionals” (241) might rush to premature embrace of his conclusions. Having introduced “pandemic anti-pioduodecimalism” (210, 228) in Chapter 8 on Pius IX, in Chapter 9, on the recent petition to Benedict XVI to prevent the beatification of Pius XII, Lawler skewers the “piophobe school of historians,” (267) often by name (242). He is devastating and entertaining.

Lawler offers no definition of “ideology.” We can take it to be what contemporary American philosophers call the “comprehensive commitments” one brings to such “public” activities as the professional practice of history. Scholars who allow their background beliefs or comprehensive commitments to trump evidence and determine conclusions are ideological. Lawler wonders whether denunciations of church and papacy by Catholic “piophobes” whose work is “tainted by deceptions and ruses” are driven by genuine Holocaust concerns or by an “agenda regarding church governance or church reform” (239). This would be to “instrumentalize” (239) and exploit the Holocaust (240).

Lawler tags Kertzer and his Catholic allies as “ideological liberals,” convinced both that Pius XII “made a conscious and deliberate decision not to save lives,” and that this justifies them in doctoring texts and falsifying data to discredit him and the papacy (238). They really believe they occupy “the higher moral ground” (265). Rather than historical truth, they are pursuing “closure,” closure for Catholics for “nearly two millennia of denigrating Jews and Judaism by Christian believers,” closure for Jews for “the incomprehensible horror of the Holocaust” (248). To a great extent, their conclusions are functions of “the postwar need for some resolution of the enduring mystery of how that murder could ever have occurred in the first place” (238). Lawler locates the “remote cause” for the “bias” of Catholic scholars “in a sense of collective guilt—however wharped and anachronistic—for the genuinely horrifying two millennia of church teaching of contempt for Jews” (279). From this combination of factors, Lawler thinks, the papacy has become a symbol of anti-Semitism and Pius XII the “scapegoat” for the Holocaust.

At this point, David Kertzer might justly accuse Lawler of claiming “divinatory powers” (xvi) similar to those Lawler regularly attributes to him. Readers are left to decide whether Lawler’s own psychologizing best satisfy the phenomenon of the “post-Hochhuth” Pius XII or whether they are functions of Lawler’s own comprehensive commitments.
In Lawler’s favor, he too, like the Catholics he diagnoses as “piophobes” is a self-professed liberal Catholic with his own church reform agenda elaborated in the book’s last three chapters. He confesses to approaching Pius XII with “largely negative” memories, as the pope who silenced Lawler’s theological heroes, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Yves Congar, and Henri de Lubac. To the memory of the latter two Lawler dedicated his 2001 book *Popes and Politics, Reform, Resentment, and Holocaust*. Eventually he concluded that Pius XII’s critics were “misguided” and their judgments of him in many cases based on “outright deceptions” (252-253, n.13). He distinguishes “liberals of an earlier generation” from the contemporary liberals he is criticizing. For them “liberalism is an all-justifying ideology” that breeds an “air of smug certitude.” This smug tone of moral superiority raises Lawler’s temperature. He prefers the liberalism of an earlier generation when it was “an orientation,” tending toward “a tentative tone expressive of possibilities and likelihoods,” rather than “unwarranted certitudes” (259).

As his invocation of Teilhard, Congar, and de Lubac suggest, Lawler is also a certain kind of liberal Catholic. In 1969 he published a book subtitled *Essays of a Conservative Liberal*. His primary theological loyalties lie with John Henry Newman and the ressourcement theologians who inspired Vatican II. During his long editorial career, he helped introduce the latter to Anglophone readers. One of this book’s most theologically provocative aspects builds on their legacy and could easily expand into another book. This is Lawler’s argument, sketched in Chapter 8 (ca 200-14), that through Pius XI (the Holy Office’s 1928 condemnation of anti-Semitism [198] and especially his 1938 exclamation that “We are all spiritual Semites” [202-03]), to Pius XII (his small but significant changes to the prayers in the Good Friday liturgy), to decisive shifts in *Nostra Aetate* (paragraph 4), and finally to John Paul II’s development of *Nostra Aetate* on the relation between Israel and the church, there has been a development of doctrine, a “gradual evolution in the institutional church regarding Judaism and Jews” (197). Lawler illustrates the first part of this shift, by bookending his treatment of development with two starkly contrasting statements of Jacques Maritain, one from 1921 before the Holocaust (199-200, n.8) and one from 1946 after the Holocaust (213).

This highlights the most stunning aspect of Lawler’s development sketch, the role of the Holocaust. Citing Newman’s dictum that “No doctrine is defined till it is violated,” he frames the Holocaust as the violation or major upheaval that led to “a momentous step occurring in a traditionary institution” (210). Despite the “incremental progress of the papacy under Pius XI regarding anti-Semitism,” Lawler argues that “without the Holocaust, there would never have been the kind of radical reassessment of Judaism and Christianity that Vatican II achieved. . . . Only a seismic event could have so rapidly reversed nearly two millennia of canonized texts, theological traditions, and ingrained popular customs” (217). After the Council, John Courtney Murray famously pointed to the question of development of doctrine raised by *Dignitatis Humanae*, but I am not aware of anyone who has treated *Nostra Aetate* on Judaism and the Church under the rubric of doctrinal development to this extent and, especially, with reference to the Holocaust.
This tantalizing theological morsel raises many questions. Lawler refers (218) to “recent theological writers who out of what I have termed ‘misplaced guilt’ are suggesting, if not agitating and clamoring for, a version of Christianity that dispenses with Christ and the church as the fulfillment of the prophets of Israel.” I read this, perhaps incorrectly, as implying Lawler’s agreement that Christ and the church do indeed, in some real way, fulfill the prophets of Israel. If my reading is correct, more work needs to be done to explain in what senses this is so, given Lawler’s warnings against “absolutist” claims near the end of the “Annex” on “Anti-Semitism and Theological Arrogance,” originally written in 1969, and appended to Chapter 9 (293). Even more urgently, someone will inevitably ask Lawler how he himself is not guilty of instrumentizing the Holocaust, turning the unspeakable into a providence, or at least one among many other signs of the times, instead of remaining silent before the magnitude of its horror.

The “Annex” mentioned above ends with admonitions against the “universalist pretensions” of “institutionalized man” (295) and transitions into the final chapter on “Ideals, Institutions, and Reform—Toward a Conclusion.” This chapter too could easily be expanded into a book and, in any case, provides the framework from which Lawler might approach the questions posed above. Here he turns to “practical reformatory consequences” (297) of his examination of Kertzer and others. This chapter reflects on institutions, their baneful absolutist tendencies, and the power of their founding principles to revivify them. It could be read as a contemporary riff on Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *The Church Against Itself: An Inquiry into the Conditions of Historical Existence for the Eschatological Community*, published by Herder and Herder in 1967. Ruether adapted with reference to the church Max Weber’s sociological notion of the “routinization of charisma.”

Kertzer’s “signature flaw,” in Lawler’s final judgment, is his failure to recognize the papacy’s “necessarily conservative socio-religious structure” (298). Lawler contrasts the conservative mission of religious institutions to preserve their foundational principles, holding fast to what is good (1 Thess 5.21), with their historical and developmental nature, the prospect of the genuinely new “presented by a providential history as the institution moves into succeeding eras” (Mt 16.3) [301]. With an audacious comparison among the church, the United States, and contemporary Israel, he explores the tensions between these two inevitable aspects of historical institutions. He wants to emphasize the “resuscitating power of foundational principles” even in the face of institutional failure. “Christianity was undeniably the seedbed in which modern racist anti-Semitism grew and flourished” (304). But the resultant horrors of the twentieth century drove Christians back to the fundamental principles of the Beatitudes and gave rise to a revolutionary change.

Lawler saves until near the end of the chapter (344ff) the “Refugee” text he has dangled before the reader from the beginning. In this first hand testimony, Pius XII is clearly shown acting in a Christ-like fashion toward Jewish refugee, Heinz Wisla, who originally signed his 1944 testimony in the *Palestine Post* anonymously as “Refugee.” William Doino, upon whom Lawler relies, tracked down his identity and
verified his testimony. Wisla’s moving account of his audience with Pius XII describes the pope as telling him twice that he should be “proud to be a Jew,” raising his voice the second time so that everyone in the audience chamber would hear (348-49). This seals Lawler’s case that Pius XII was not an anti-Semite.

Two further comments conclude an already lengthy review. First, as part of his own church reform agenda, Lawler inserts into this chapter, a lengthy plea for those “most contemned among the afflicted,” those “whose sexual orientation now separates them from the hierarchical leaders of the ‘followers of Christ’”(318). By analogy with the church’s revolutionary change on anti-Semitism, Lawler affirms in hope that some twenty-first century pope will tell a gay or lesbian person to be proud of their sexual orientation (320, n.27). Whether one thinks it wise or not to analogize Jews gassed during the Holocaust and people discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, or agrees with Lawler’s arguments in this section (318-336), it is difficult to deny that “the issue of homosexuality has reached critical mass in today’s religious world” (324) or to attempt an answer to Lawler’s rhetorical question: “Where else than from the Creator could it [sexual orientation] have come?” (321).

Finally, the distinction between the Christian tradition of anti-Judaism and modern racist, exterminationist anti-Semitism brings us back to the question raised in We Remember: “But it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudice embedded in some Christian minds and hearts.” Lawler scores We Remember’s failure to answer with a simple “yes” and likens the tone of its “garbled answer” to that of a “PR campaign by a multinational corporation” (54). Yet he insists that the distinction remains “undeniable” (53) and “essential” (55). Kertzer attributes the distinction itself to a postwar Catholic conspiracy and claims that it “will simply not survive historical scrutiny” (Kertzer, 6-7, and Chapter 10 on “Race”). Leaving aside questions about whether Kertzer did violence to his sources, the validity of the distinction between Christian anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism is the key substantive issue of interpretation between Lawler and Kertzer.

Kertzer’s antipathy for the distinction is not hard to understand. In We Remember’s account of “Relations Between Jews and Christians,” the author of The Kidnapping of Edgar Mortara read that “By the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jews generally had achieved an equal standing with other citizens of most states. . . .” “Keeping Jews in their Place,” Part One (Chapters 1-5) and about 35% of the text of The Popes Against the Jews, recounts conditions in the Papal States where Jews had clearly not achieved “equal standing with other citizens.” Lawler admits that the Civiltà Cattolica articles Kertzer cites, especially in Chapters 6 and 7, are “horrifying” and that We Remember is evasive and dissimulating. This could tempt one to “bulldoze away all nuance” in treating the distinction. But Kertzer is an historian and bases his rejection of the distinction on an appeal to “historical scrutiny.” Is this appeal credible?

Hannah Arendt offers a sobering contrast to Kertzer. In The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), she refers to the Civiltà Cattolica as “for decades the most
outspokenly antisemitic and one of the most influential Catholic magazines in the world” (133, n.44). Yet her own account of “the birth of anti-Semitism” in that book is primarily economic, social, and political (Chapters 1-4). Writing after Hochhuth, both in her 1964 review of “The Deputy” and in a long passage at the beginning of the 1967 Preface to The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), she takes the distinction between Christian anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism for granted. “Anti-Semitism, a secular nineteenth-century ideology . . . and religious Jew hatred, inspired by the mutually hostile antagonism of two conflicting creeds, are obviously not the same.” She goes so far as to question “even the extent to which the former derives its arguments and emotional appeal from the latter” (3).

Her review of Hochhuth is consistent with this position. Regarding the motivation for Vatican policies from 1933 to 1945, she writes: “The worst one can say—and it has been said often—is that Catholic ‘medieval anti-Semitism’ must be blamed for the Pope’s silence about the massacres of Jews.” She notes that Hochhuth “wisely” did not include this in the play, wanting ‘to keep only to provable facts’.” Then she adds: “Even if it could be proved that the Vatican approved of a certain amount of anti-Semitism among the faithful. . . , it would be quite beside the point.” And this because “Catholic anti-Semitism had two limitations which it could not transgress without contradicting Catholic dogma and the efficacy of the sacraments—it could not agree to the gassing of Jews any more than it could agree to the gassing of the mentally ill, and it could not extend its anti-Jewish sentiments to those who were baptized.” She then goes on to direct a blistering internal critique at the German hierarchy and Pius XII for abandoning “Catholic non-Aryans.” “During the years of the Final Solution,” none “were more forsaken by all mankind” than Jewish converts to Catholicism (Responsibility and Judgment [2003; original 1964], 214-26, at 223-25).

The U.S. Catholic bishops go further than Arendt in calling Catholic anti-Judaism a necessary but not sufficient cause of modern anti-Semitism (Lawler, 56). Lawler’s defense of the distinction is consistent with Chapter 10 on institutions and their founding principles and with his developmental view of Christian anti-Semitism in the twentieth century in Chapter 8. He demonstrates conclusively that, at key points in his argument, Kertzer, to all appearances in service to a moral posture, has done violence to his sources. This dishonors the historical profession and renders suspect his appeal to history against the distinction, however otiose, between anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism. Were the Popes Against the Jews? intervenes decisively in the “anti-pioduodecimalist war” (236). Scholars cannot afford to ignore it.
With good reason Justus George Lawler has been called the Grand Old Man of American Catholic Letters. It is doubtful if anyone else today could boast of publishing his first magazine article when he was a high school student in the mid 1940s. Since then Lawler has had a distinguished career as a university professor, publisher, editor of four periodicals including *Jubilee* and *Continuum*, and is the author of over a dozen books. The topics of the books run the gamut from a study of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins to the ethical treatment of animals, a cause that he took up fifty years, long before it became fashionable. As a self-styled conservative liberal, in his last book, *Popes and Politics: Reform, Resentment and the Holocaust* (2004), he distanced himself from both the uncritical apologists for Pope Pius XII and well as his detractors.

In this most recent book, *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* Lawler has broadened his investigation of the same topic to include the six pontiffs between Pius IX and Pius XII. The time frame and even the title of the book reflect the fact that it is a response to David I. Kertzer’s *The Popes Against the Jews* (2001). In 1997 Kertzer, the Paul Dupee, Jr., University Professor of Social Science at Brown University, published *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, his first major work on a theme that has become one of his major interests, the relationship between the contemporary papacy and the Jews. The Mortara case involved a six-year old Jewish boy in Bologna, then part of the Papal States, who was forcibly removed from his parents in 1858 and placed in an orphanage because he had been clandestinely baptized by a Catholic servant when he became seriously ill. The incident caused outrage throughout Europe, but the pope of the day, Pius IX, adamantly defended the decision and even became a surrogate father to the young child, who later became a priest. When Pius IX was beatified in 2000, Kertzer publicly questioned the appropriateness of the decision partially at least on the basis of his role in the Mortara case.

A year later Kertzer published a more ambitious work, *The Popes Against the Jews*, a study of the attitude of the popes to the Jews from Napoleon to the Second Vatican Council. It was not a purely academic exercise. Kertzer intended his book to be a critical response to *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*, a papal document that was in preparation for eleven years and was issued in 1998 by the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. While not absolving earlier popes of mistreatment of the Jews, *The Popes Against the Jews* detailed the often shameful attitude of the early and mid-nineteenth century popes to the Jews and the discrimination to which they were subjected in the Papal States. The most provocative and controversial part of the book was Kertzer’s claim that Christian anti-Semitism, especially as sanctioned and encouraged by the popes, paved the way for the pagan anti-Semitism of the Nazis that resulted in the Holocaust.

Kertzer’s book received a favorable reception from many critics, including a number of Catholic scholars like Eugene Fisher and John Pawlikowski, who had long been active in Catholic-Jewish relations. However, a more reserved response came
from a Jewish scholar, Rabbi Marc Saperstein, who offered one of the most perceptive and nuanced analyses of Kertzer’s book in a review in Commonweal under the title of “An Indictment: Half Right.” Saperstein, who at the time was Charles E. Smith Professor of Jewish History and Director of the Program in Judaic Studies at George Washington University, claimed that Kertzer had actually produced two books under one cover. He hailed the first “book,” which was Kertzer’s description of the mistreatment of the Jews by the popes, as a “compelling work of scholarship,” but he dismissed Kertzer’s second “book,” his claim that the papacy had played an indispensable role in paving the way to the Holocaust, as polemical and unconvincing.

Unlike Saperstein, Justus George Lawler admits that he originally formed a rather favorable impression of Kertzer’s book, but the author’s self-satisfied tone led Lawler to examine the contents more carefully. As a result of what Lawler calls “inaccurate translations, waffled data and even doctored texts,” his originally positive reaction gave way to “accelerating disapproval.” There were so many negative features in the book, he said, “that even a sympathetic reader—as I originally was—had to conclude that this author was drastically overreaching, if not intentionally deceiving.” Lawler found it especially difficult to accept Kertzer’s underlying thesis that the contemporary papacy played such a crucial role in the development of modern anti-Semitism that without the papacy there would have been no Holocaust. Lawler has now developed his misgivings into an exhaustive analysis of Kertzer’s book. The subtitle, Tracking the Myths, Confronting the Ideologues, indicates the twin thrusts of his critique, which is part detective work, part robust polemic, served up in an inimitable and sometimes maddeningly digressive argumentative style in which he rarely misses an opportunity to sail around Cape Horn when he could just as easily have slipped through the Panama Canal.

One of the themes that Kertzer is fond of propagating is that the popes themselves rarely voiced any anti-Semitic sentiments because they relied on others to perform this distasteful task in the Catholic press, especially in the pages of Osservatore Romano, the official newspaper of the Holy See, and Civiltà Cattolica, the fortnightly magazine of the Roman Jesuits. Even Kertzer is hard pressed to find much evidence of anti-Semitism in Osservatore Romano, but Civiltà Cattolica is another matter. Lawler readily admits that it was openly anti-Semitic after 1880, but he claims that the Vatican exercised only a loose and perfunctory supervision over the magazine, leaving the Jesuit editors on a long leash. However, he overlooks the fact that Vatican officials could pull hard on the leash when the Jesuits published articles that displeased them. Father Carlo Curci, one of the founders of Civiltà Cattolica in 1850, quickly found himself dismissed from the magazine and from the Society of Jesus when he ventured to express sympathetic opinions about Italian unification and religious toleration.

Lawler is on firmer ground when he disputes the claim that Civiltà Cattolica served as a model and inspiration for anti-Semitism in the Catholic press throughout the world. In France the Augustinians of the Assumption needed no help from Roman Jesuits in turning their Paris daily, La Croix, into a virulently ant-Semitic newspaper during the Dreyfus Affair. Likewise, three decades later in the United States, when
Father Charles Coughlin tried to make the Jews the scapegoats for the Bolshevik Revolution and the Depression both on the radio and in his magazine Social Justice, the initiative for this slander came from Coughlin himself, not from Rome.

Kertzer pounces on two statements of Pope Pius IX where he claims that the pope dropped the mask and personally made anti-Semitic statements. One was the pontiff’s reference to the “synagogue of Satan,” a cryptic phrase repeated twice in the Book of Revelation that has been explained in various ways by Scripture scholars. Pius IX used the phrase on two occasions, once in 1864 and again in 1873, and it was repeated at least once by his successor, Leo XIII. From a careful reading of the context, Lawler makes a convincing case that the reference was not to the Jews, but to the Freemasons whom many nineteenth-century Catholics were prone to blame for all the political reverses that the Church experienced in the latter years of that century. In sum, says Lawler, “the phrase was simply the malediction of choice for people seeking to describe what they regarded as consummate evil.”

Lawler has a more difficult task explaining Pius IX’s homily in August 1871 when he referred to the Jews of Rome, newly emancipated from the ghetto by the Italian government, as “dogs” barking in the streets. The biblical reference (which Kertzer fails to give) is to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. Jesus initially refused to cure her daughter because she was a gentile and he said that it was not fitting to take the bread of the children of Israel and feed it to the dogs. Once she expressed her faith in Jesus, however, he ceased to consider her a “dog” and welcomed her as a “child.” In the pope’s unfortunate analogy the Jews would likewise cease to be dogs and would be welcomed as children when they accepted Christianity. However insensitive and offense the language, Pius IX was expressing in a clumsy fashion his hope for the conversion of the Jews, not launching a pogrom. On this occasion he demonstrated the same tin ear for public relations that he had shown a decade earlier when he issued the Syllabus of Errors. Smarter popes than Pius IX have since committed similar faux pas despite their press secretaries. Poor Pio Nono had no one to turn to for advice except an entourage that one French Catholic layman described as “the court of Louis XVI with more virtue.”

Perhaps Lawler’s most severe indictment of Kertzer involves his description of a trial of a Jewish man in Kiev in 1913 for the age-old blood libel of ritual murder, the last such judicial travesty in European history. “Kertzer rigs the evidence against the papacy,” says Lawler, “by feigning ignorance of indispensable truths that he himself shows that he had evidence of.” The sensational trial led Jewish leaders throughout Europe to mount a defense of the alleged perpetrator. As part of their defense, Lord Leopold Rothschild in London requested Cardinal Merry del Val, the papal secretary of state, to vouch for the authenticity of two papal repudiations of the blood libel, one by Pope Innocent IV in the thirteenth century and the other by the future Benedict XIV in the eighteenth century.

Merry del Val complied with the request and forwarded a letter or telegram to Kiev via Lord Rothschild in London. However, the court in Kiev ruled that Merry del Val’s communication had to be certified by a Russian official in order for it to be admitted
as evidence. According to the source that Kertzer used for this incident, “the Russian ambassador in Rome did everything possible [to insure] that the document should arrive in Kiev too late to be submitted as evidence...” Kertzer omits this crucial sentence in his account of the incident, placing the blame for the delay entirely on Merry del Val, and not on the Russian ambassador, thus leaving the impression that the cardinal secretary of state was indifferent to the fate of the Jewish victim in Kiev who was on trial for his life. It is hard to imagine a professional historian failing to recognize that suppressio veri is suggestio falsi.

Kertzer dismisses out of hand the notion that is sometimes floated of Pius XI and Pius XII as the nice pope versus the mean pope with regard to the Jews. He regards them both as anti-Semites. Achille Ratti, the future Pius XI, was plucked from academia by Benedict XV in the summer of 1918 to serve first as apostolic visitor and then as nuncio to Poland as World War I drew to a close. Kertzer indictts Ratti not only for failing to comply with Benedict’s orders to look after the welfare of Poland’s Jews, but for doing “everything he could to impede any Vatican action on behalf of the Jews.” Kertzer cites a report from Ratti to Benedict XV in January 1919 in which he referred to the Jews as “one of the most evil and one of the strongest influences” in Poland. Lawler takes issue with the translation of nefaste as “evil,” claiming that a more accurate translation would be “ill-fated” or “inauspicious.” Lawler also notes that Kertzer limited his examination of Ratti’s role in Poland to only five or six months of his three years in Warsaw as the papal emissary.

It is surprising that Lawler does not make greater use of Neal Pease’s Rome’s Most Faithful Daughter (2009). As Lawler notes, Pease draws on a wide variety of Polish-language sources, and he comes to a far more balanced and favorable appraisal of Ratti’s three years in Poland than Kertzer. Pease calls attention to the culture shock that the sheltered Ratti experienced at finding himself for the first time in his life in a country with a large Jewish minority. “Achille Ratti appears to have held the conventionally unfavorable towards Jews for a European Catholic of his generation,” says Pease, “until, by his own account, his stint as nuncio to Poland awoke in him a new sympathy for the people that had given the world its redeemer: for him, the Jew, formerly an abstract concept, now had acquired a human face.” Pease credits Ratti first as nuncio and later as pope with inducing the Polish primate, August Cardinal Hlond, to speak out against racism and putting pressure on the Polish Catholic press to tone down its anti-Semitic rhetoric.

It is curious that so few critics have called attention to the relentlessly negative tone that Kertzer adopts toward the papacy. An exception is Rabbi Saperstein who noted Kertzer’s tendency “to judge every statement by church officials in the worst possible light.” Perhaps the most egregious example of this tendency is Kertzer’s account of the famous incident in Rome in September 1938 when Pius XI told a group of Belgian pilgrims that “it is not possible for Christians to participate in anti-Semitism.” “Spiritually we are all Semites,” the pope explained.” Kertzer concedes that they may be the most famous words ever uttered by Pius XI, but he proceeds to marginalize them and to cast a pall over them by noting that in the same breath the
pope defends the right of people to defend their own legitimate interests. For Kertzer that conjures up the specter of the pope drawing on his experience in post-World War I Poland to defend pogroms unleashed on the innocent Jewish population.

Although Lawler does not mention it, Kertzer adopts the same dismissive attitude to *Mit brennender Sorge*, Pius XI’s encyclical in 1937 denouncing the racism of the Nazi regime. Kertzer devotes one paragraph to it and fails to mention that, in a breathtaking example of Teutonic efficiency, it was smuggled into the Third Reich under the nose of the Gestapo and was read from 11,500 Catholic pulpits in Germany on Palm Sunday of that year. Carlo Falconi, no cheerleader for the twentieth-century papacy by any means, described it as “the first great official public document to dare to confront and criticize Nazism,” and he said that “the pope’s courage astonished the world.”

When *The Popes Against the Jews* was published in 2001, it quickly became apparent that this was a book that demanded a response. Lawler has tried to furnish that response. Unfortunately he has been only been partially successful. In the first few chapters, through his meticulous examination of Kertzer’s sometimes questionable use of sources, he has called into question the validity of some of Kertzer’s conclusions and raised serious doubts about Kertzer’s objectivity. Unfortunately, however, especially in the last two lengthy chapters, the book loses focus and drifts off into a discussion of a number of irrelevant topics.

It must be confessed that even Lawler’s irrelevant but witty *obiter dicta* can make rewarding reading. With regard to a tendentious recent biography of Bishop Clemens von Galen of Munster, Lawler accuses the author of introducing a new form of death—“by a thousand optatives.” It should also be emphasized that he is no means a dogmatic defender of papal intolerance toward the Jews. He is as ready as Kertzer (and Saperstein) to admit and deplore the shameful treatment of the Jews by both medieval and modern popes. He is also highly critical of *We Remember*, the Vatican’s response to the Shoah, characterizing its mealy-mouthed declarations as more akin to a disclaimer by a multinational pharmaceutical company than a heartfelt confession of sorrow and regret by a church committed to the primacy of love.

What sticks in Lawler’s craw is Kertzer’s argument that papal antipathy to the Jews was “the antechamber to the Holocaust,” the crucial and indispensable element in paving the way to Hitler’s attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. If he has not formulated the definite response to Kertzer’s accusation, he has performed an inestimable service for all future historians by providing them with invaluable materials to use in formulating such a response.

Apparently the *status questionis* about the relationship of Pius XII to the Holocaust now seems to be that the final verdict must remain in abeyance until the opening of the relevant sections of the Vatican Archives. Perhaps yes, perhaps no. Perhaps no amount of new factual information derived from the archives will ever settle the question of the wisdom of the judgment calls that Pius XII was forced to make during World War II. Lawler gets to the heart of the matter when he asks “whether it is possible to really believe that any statement of any pope, no matter how...
vigorously and repeatedly proclaimed, could in fact have had any deterrent effect on
Hitler’s vicious plot for the Jews of Europe.” And yet there remains the haunting
question, raised by the renowned Louvain church historian Roger Aubert thirty-five
years ago, and recently repeated by Eamon Duffy, “whether a less diplomatic, a more
‘prophetic’ pope would not have felt it his duty, whatever the consequences, to testify
more vigorously in the name of the Gospel instead of sticking to the principle of the
lesser evil.” It is unlikely that any document in the archives will provide a ready-made
answer to that terribly complex question.
The Author Replies

Most of the commentaries above strike me as fair and balanced (adjectives now tainted by alien abuse), as well as in occasional need of further elaboration. Nevertheless, no one could hope for more generous reviewers, certainly at least in terms of taking the time to interrupt their busy schedules and discuss this book. Though I must confess to never having heard before of my status as “Grand Old Man” of anything at all, much less of “American Catholic Letters.” The original GOM was Queen Victoria’s Prime Minister and Cardinal Newman’s occasional antagonist, William Gladstone—of whom a more virulent antagonist, Benjamin Disraeli, said GOM really stood for, “God’s Only Mistake.” Gladstone was also called the “old man in a hurry,” which to some readers of these remarks may explain why they are relatively brief. That brevity, in turn, might lead to amplifying further the original GOM, until this final transformation via Lord Randolph Churchill was perpetrated: “that dreadful old man in a hurry”—a transformation not to be explored by the present writer.

Justus George Lawler at the grave of Wallace Stevens, 1992
However, before getting any further into these commentaries, I must pay tribute to Christopher Kauffman’s role as editor of *U.S. Catholic Historian*. In an era when print media in general, and religious print media in particular, appear to be in decline, and where the usual solution takes the form of trivializing the content or repressing the religious element altogether, he has been faithful to the literal meaning of the title of his journal by organizing, usually around a specific theme, serious scholarly studies of serious religious matters. This tribute to him must be shared with the Catholic University of America Press which took up the sponsorship of this journal when more lavishly endowed institutions were in the process of sloughing it off, and it faced the prospect of extinction. American Catholicism is the richer for the good judgment of both this editor and this publisher.

**C. J. T. Talar**

Talar’s “Tracking Myths, Confronting Ideologies,” is such a tour de force of comprehensive abridgement that I hesitate to praise it lest readers decide to skip the book and settle for the summary.

But what first struck me in this review was the skill it put on display in synthesizing not only disparate themes and motifs but books also—as when Talar linked the present work with its somewhat distant predecessor, *Popes and Politics, Reform, Resentment, and the Holocaust*. Although that book focused on the writings of many people, and the present book on one, they both engage issues of church governance, doctrinal claims, and gender conflict. Talar also pointed out that the common focus on the church as institution was ignored by Kertzer who then discussed individual popes divorced from their actual historical context.

Talar is particularly cogent in treating of those four popular myths—“synagogue of Satan” as referring to Judaism, Jews referred to as “dogs,” papal support of the blood libel, and the future Pius XI as supporter of priests calling for the extermination of all the Jews in the world. The implicit consequence of that latter falsehood is that Pius XI, through the medium of the Catholic press, would not only support accusations of ritual murder, but that he would also prepare the way for his successor’s tolerance and even implicit acceptance of the Nazi exterminationist program. Talar writes; ”In his penultimate chapter Lawler broaches the question of ‘whether it is possible to really believe that any statement of any pope, no matter how vigorously and repeatedly proclaimed could in fact have had any deterrent effect on Hitler’s vicious plot for the Jews of Europe.”

Since this is the first and most detailed summation of *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* I will address a point the other reviewers (Talar being the exception) skirt in one way or another: the seemingly tenuous link between what might be called the body of the book and the final chapters, particularly the last two which take up much larger themes regarding the institutionalizing of religious and/or political ideals. Those themes had been gestating for some time, and being an old man in a hurry (or
whatever), I decided to incorporate them into this book. But that was hardly the only motive. Friends and colleagues and editors, when they learned about the project would occasionally make observations on the unlikeliness of a book critiquing another book that was a decade old (or as Paula Kane dismissively words it, “one ten-year old study,”) making its way in a crowded marketplace. Since I already had a first-rate publisher, the matter concerned only the issue of public response—although that was not insignificant.

It took an additional six months—to the consternation of said publisher—not so much to compose the final chapters, much of which was already in hand, but to reconstruct the other chapters from beginning to end so that the final material did not look like an arbitrary appendage.

I have no doubt that the seams are still somewhat visible, and the preparatory links obtrusive; but in the overall I ended up satisfied with the last two chapters as broadening out and expanding many of the issues raised in the earlier ones. However, had I known that Kertzer himself was going to give new life to his “ten-year old study” by what is clearly a sequel on Pius XI and Mussolini, I would certainly not have added those chapters, but would have held them over to be integrated from the very beginning into something titled more of less along the lines of Were Pius XI and Mussolini Co-conspirators? Kertzer with his habitual woodenness uses the term “Co-dependent” of the alleged relationship—which presumably was not consummated in Rome but in Minneapolis.

Also relevant to “what I would have done” are several illustrations exemplifying the ironies entailed in the narrative. I have been struck many times by the phenomenon of the world’s heroes in the struggle against Hitler’s murderous agenda being Churchill and Roosevelt—who actually could have mustered physical force to destroy the death camps—while the world’s villain is Pius XII who had nothing to enlist but the fragile instrument of the spoken word. My original hope was to actually include half a dozen or so of Gary Larson’s “Far Side” cartoons as a way of ameliorating a narrative that focused so unremittingly on evil and death. I still view Larson’s literally inter-ludic variations as simply a modern form of what Rowlandson and Hogarth had exemplified a couple of centuries earlier—a way of holding up to mockery what is in danger of being reduced to stereotype. The contrast between the politicians and the pope entailed the following description—which is quoted from an early version of the book.

In a parlor-like room, with a large entry way and a portrait of an elderly gentleman on the wall, are seated on one side of the room a husband and wife who are staring at three figures on a couch on the other side of the room. In the entrance way a detective—hat and coat on, and wearing a badge—is pointing toward one of those figures. They are, respectively, a man in a semiformal black suit, an elephant wearing a coat and a baseball cap, and an elderly lady in a plain white dress. The caption reads: “And the murderer is . . . THE BUTLER! Yes, the butler . . . who I’m convinced, first gored the Colonel to death before trampling him to smithereens.”
Since the readers of this symposium are going to face a rather long haul, I will provide another momentary reprieve before moving on to the other reviews. This particular cartoon relates to an earlier instance of the utter arbitrariness of the scapegoating process; again, as envisioned by Larson, who was first described as “an artist who in terms of creativity and insight into human (and animal) foibles puts to shame the ham-handed ironies of Warhol’s dollar signs or Jasper Johns’s beer cans.”

This drawing is of a man in a window looking down at a mob of people in the street carrying signs saying, “Down with Wayne,” “Destroy Wayne,” “No More Wayne,” “Wayne Must Go!” The printed caption reads: “The world was going down the tubes. They needed a scapegoat. They found Wayne.” (This syllabic formula, from eight to six to three echoes literally the reductio ad absurdum being depicted.)

Now, back to what actually is in that book. Talar discerningly remarks on the two final chapters—which, as noted, may appear to some as a lengthy appendix to the body of the book: “Structural explanations of events are not meant to elide human agency from consideration but they can and do set limits on human action.” He then continues in language and in insight, which improves on the material in the book itself, with this observation. “Hence the inclusion of both “ideals” and “institutions” in the title of the final chapter. . . .” He wisely leaves unanswered his concluding question regarding the church: “How can past and future be reconciled without occluding or abandoning its foundational principles?”

Nor will that question be asked or answered in any anticipated project of Justus George Lawler. The very dearth of my observations on Talar’s brilliantly developed and carefully composed summary of the book is itself the highest praise I can proffer. I attest to that phenomenon more fully in the next commentary by a writer who has none of the virtues evidenced in Talar’s introduction to Were the Popes Against the Jews?

Paula Kane

On January 9, 2012, after having received two of the outside readers’ reviews of the book, I wrote the editor of USCH as follows:

More and more, the prospect of having to revisit this material once again is disheartening. Since I noticed the other day, for the first time, that the symposium on Dionne’s book does not have a response by the author, it set me to thinking I would emulate the columnist. The reviews by the commentators are more than adequate, so that for me to add my two-cents worth is bound to appear redundant. I’m all for letting them have the last word.
He replied: “We published an entire issue on symposium reviews and all the authors responded. I am sure that these reviewers are expecting your response. OK?”

I did say OK, but when I received the final set of comments from someone named Paula Kane, I feared that her expectations for the piece titled, “Pius Wars: Let’s Blame the Liberal Professors,” would probably not be fulfilled. I had read her article more than once, before writing these remarks, and each time I was left more and more puzzled.

I had originally not the least familiarity with her work, knowing only through the editor of *USCH* that she was a Catholic and a historian, so I assumed that her field of specialization probably had something to do with the church in the United States. The first time I read the piece it dawned on me that possibly there had been some misunderstanding, and I was wondering whether her field of specialization was history at all; or indeed, as I read further, whether English was her native language. The text she had sent was so full of contradictions and obfuscations relative to matters religious, social, and personal, that I wondered whether she may not have been—in the politically approved language of the times—“intellectually challenged.” She appeared also to be “socially challenged,” since the tone of her piece was arrogantly aggressive—so much so, that it put me in mind of Newman’s critique of E. B. Pusey’s *Eirenicon*: “You discharge your olive-branch as from a catapult.” Only Kane discharges her review as from a cluster bomb.

One immediate conclusion I reached regarding this *USCH* symposium in general was that, after reading her meandering opinions, I would certainly have to radically moderate my criticism of Thomas Shelley for what I had regarded as serious defects regarding facts, tone, and interpretations in his contribution. The reason was simply that these defects, when compared to those of Kane, were venial, if not trivial. Unfortunately, his rebuttal had already been definitively proof-read and sent off to the editor—nevertheless, my amends for excessive severity will surely follow at some point in the unknown future.1

In her first paragraph Kane mentions the future Pius XII, whose name appears in her article over a dozen times, although he is the one modern pope who is mentioned only in passing in *Were the Popes Against the Jews*?. Nor did his initial appearance in Kane’s contribution augur well either for the accuracy of her historical knowledge or for the competency of her judgments: “Pacelli, although he never met Adolf Hitler, lived in Germany while serving as papal nuncio there from 1930 to 1939—right up to the eve of World War II.” The unsubtle pettiness of “although he never met Adolf Hitler,” plus the invented slight of “right up to the eve of World War II,” along with the whole chronological mélange as nuncio (1930-1939)—all this smacked of the

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1. Once he goes from Very Rev. to Rt. Rev., or, *Deus volens*, to Most Rev., I will join him in celebrating. I have read one of my early heroes, Canon Patrick A. Sheehan, and, in turn, Sheehan’s *Luke Doheny* and *My New Curate*, and I have learned to appreciate such moments in life’s flow, especially for the men who minister to the whole church in a period when such ministry has come under what is often unfair attack.
Sarah Palin school of historiography. This tempted me to think of terminating any further comments on her views, particularly since her clearly expressed opinions—inflated by a considerable air of self-righteousness—couldn’t be dismissed as the result of haste or chance, since she had been allotted as much time as the other contributors. Those dates above were comparable to someone casually talking about “1812 when the Civil War began. . .” and then continuing on from that chronological purview to explain who actually lived at the Gettysburg address.

I had already mulled over the catachresis of this opening sentence: "It is hard to ask the question ‘Were the Popes against the Jews?’ especially after seeing the inspiring film, ‘Of Gods and Men’ (2010).” The implication of this verbal curiosity appears to be that the quoted title of the book was merely a general query unrelated to any specific context or content, much less to any specific historical narrative. Regardless of the power of the film—which I don’t know of anyone who doesn’t acknowledge—the arbitrary combination of two totally disparate entities, a 2010 movie and a 2012 book, was presumably validated by the fact of their both being encountered by this writer—at whose good taste readers must surely marvel. More naive literalism about what can’t seem to be recognized as merely a book title was then mixed with a little vitriol, as this obsolete historical datum was put on display.

Why continue to ask in 2012, if the popes were against the Jews? What possible outcomes can be expected from this question, given the limitations of evidence that prevents access to materials in the Vatican Archives after 1922?

Apart from her persistence in treating that restricted book title as if it were a generalized question, there is the glib unawareness that this access “prevention” had been amended, and that as a result the last several years witnessed a host of books relying on post-1922 Vatican “evidence.”

But it was the further lamination of *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* to two more unrelated historical events that had to leave one wondering if that italicized “question”—just cited—was recognized as having anything to do with a book at all. The excerpted passage above ended with this non sequitur: “Second, the hotly contested and volatile question about the role of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust will not be answered by one book.” That truism about “one book” presumably was intended to address and correct some unknown aberration that Kane had discovered in Lawler’s work, though what it is or why it has been perpetrated is something that she does not reveal. But that “one book” can certainly not refer to *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* since of the half dozen modern popes from Pius IX up to Pius XII, the latter is hardly discussed at all. Where his predecessors have paragraph after paragraph, and even whole chapters devoted to them, Pope Pacelli is mentioned often but only briefly, and mainly as a chronological marker or as a symbolic (and slandered) figure. As to something not being answered “by one book,” perhaps Kane had been reading that other GOM, Gladstone, who certainly at some time or other must have trotted out the old chestnut about fearing *homo unius libri.*
Then there is this denigrating and warped assertion which confirmed definitively that Kane does believe *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* is about the controversy over the undepicted and undescribed Pius XII—a belief that provides another indication that she had never read the book she is discussing with such flamboyant certitude.

Justus George Lawler adds his voice to the *Pius wars* in a lengthy tome of ten chapters, by means of an unfurling set of reviews of recent books that he describes as “self-serving polemics” on the relationship between modern popes and the Jews. He concentrates his efforts mostly on refuting one ten-year old study, David Kertzer’s *The Popes against the Jews* (2001), (and to some degree, John Cornwell’s *Hitler’s Pope*, 1999) ostensibly to correct factual errors, mistranslations, and faulty arguments. (italics supplied)

It’s hard to say where “unfurling set of recent books” came from—much less what it is intended to mean; though it can be said that the use of “tome” and the emphasis on “ten-year old study” does reflect the subtlety of the undergraduate polemic being initiated here. As to Cornwell, whenever he is mentioned in the book it is usually *en passant* and briefly, so presumably he is introduced here in order to add more time to that obsolescence (“ten-year old study”) Kane eagerly anticipates, since he predates Kertzer by a couple of years. It also tends to further confirm the view that Kane never actually read the book she is reviewing, for of the host of authors who are criticized, Cornwell (like his nemesis, Pius XII) is among those who get the least space. However, since his name is mentioned frequently as representative of a contemptible journalistic genre, it does appear disproportionately often in the index—a copy of which I had to send Kane by express mail so she could count the number of times the name appears, and thus “prove” that Cornwell is also where Lawler “concentrates his efforts.” As to that other concentrated effort, “mostly” on Kertzer, it is the final confirmation that she hadn’t read the book—much less the title—since the entire work, except the two final chapters, is centered on him and his aberrations.

Turning now to her comprehension of the fragments she did read, the instance below is both exemplary and hilarious. In *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* there is a brief reference to Kertzer’s self-inflating assertion that as a result of his writings he had “become America’s foremost expert on the modern history of the Vatican’s relations with the Jews.” In *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* while deriding this bit of vanity, I noted in passing that it had been “published on Kertzer’s own website.” For reasons known only to herself, what lodged itself in Paula Kane’s memory bank was not the repulsive arrogance of Kertzer’s self-administered plaudit; nor was it the vehicle of its transmission (his “own website”) but it was the medium of its transmission: “published.”

The inconceivably elaborate metastasis of this simple mechanical process—made even more rudimentary and commonplace in the digital era—is embodied in the excerpt below. Here at her high point—her Mt. Everest of misreading and incomprehension—Kane transforms Lawler’s attack on Kertzer for his self-exalting statement.
into an assault on its conveyor, “publishing.” For the first time in real history, and
Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding, the medium replaces the message—with almost
seismic consequences.

Lawler is too easily infuriated by the advertising hype of the publishing industry,
such as that proclaiming Kertzer as “America’s foremost expert on the modern his-
tory of the Vatican’s relations with the Jews.” Kertzer has enjoyed ten of his fif-
teen minutes of fame, but we are not obliged to believe everything that is said of
him (or about Daniel Goldhagen or John Cornwell), and so it is difficult to share
Lawler’s outrage with the hyperbole of trade publishing.

There is absolutely no way of discerning how or why she composed this tirade about
hyperbole, outrage, fame, hype, Goldhagen, Cornwell, advertising, belief, etc., all
derived from those twin phenomena, “the publishing industry,” “trade publishing,”
and all of which in turn are founded on the frail basis of Kertzer having published on
his website his pipedream of being “America’s foremost expert” on Jews and popes.
Kane’s non sequiturs earlier have morphed into the delusional. Nothing regarding
Kertzer’s self-engendered and self-administered claim or acclaim has to do with any
industry of any kind much less the publishing industry or trade publishing. There was
no hype anywhere proclaiming Kertzer an expert on anything except his own hype;
nor is there anything anywhere in Lawler’s book that says anything like that. Kane
simply doesn’t read well enough to grasp the meaning of big, complicated, confus-
ing, and ambiguous concepts—like the word “published.”

However, given the sheer arbitrariness of this display of animus towards that
“industry,” it would not be going too far afield to speculate that perhaps this writer had
at some unknown point in her career undergone an experience—probably not tra-
umatic but at least bruising—that deranged her a bit on the subject of published, pub-
lishing, and publishers. Perhaps it was some kind of unfortunate experiences when
seeking to get a manuscript into print. But for this experience to worm its way into a
critique of Were the Popes Against the Jews? it must have been something very severe;
probably not just a few negative verbal reactions, but more likely enough rejections to
paper a small room with form-letters spurning her creativity. Certainly from her pres-
ent performance, this scenario is not difficult to envisage since it is hard to conceive
any publisher welcoming such mangled language impelled by such aggressive intent.

Alas! would that she had contacted this quondam editor who—although part of the
dastardly publishing industry—was nevertheless instrumental in launching the entire
field originally known as “feminist studies in religion”; he even had an annual award
for the most significant book in that field. He can vouch for the fact that he would
have, as he had for scores of others, happily advised her, and sent her contentedly on
her way with useful directives for composing a readable book. Alack! As the poet
said: “Wisest fate says no; this must not yet be so.”

Apart from that brief, last (and understandably hesitant) gesture of solidarity with
Kane, Lawler would seem to be absolved of his aberrant behavior vis-a-vis the mys-
my sense of Lawler’s frustration is that he may not fully appreciate the comp lex-
ity of academic disciplines, conferences, and publishing. Despite his conspira tori-
al fantasies, complete unanimity on any historical issue among scholars is rare,
and there are still robust differences between history books marketed to the public
and those published by academic presses.

Yes, it must be admitted, this assertion—to the degree it is comprehensible—is
probably true. However, it is difficult for us outsiders, particularly when experi-
encing frustration about this or that or the other thing, to appreciate what these
scholars have to undergo in that world which, as Kane formally points out, is made
up of such singularly burdensome chores as disciplines, conferences, and (the mon-
ster is threatening again!), publishing. Confronting any one of these would tax ordi-
nary mortals, but to cope with all of them in the totality of their threefold com-
plexity, that calls for rarer robustness and sterner stuff than your run-of-the-mill
fantasizer could ever summon up. It calls for someone like Kane, who is both beam-
blind and deft-handed.

But, rather than thinking of Hoplins (to whom I just alluded), I couldn’t help but
think, as I read her “review,” of Newman on Kingsley. She is so deliciously detached
from reality that I would have loved to compose the kind of exchange Newman
dreamt up for himself and his attacker.

Mr. Kingsley relaxes: “Do you know, I like your tone. From your tone I
rejoice, greatly rejoice, to be able to believe that you did not mean what you said.”

I rejoin: “Mean it! I maintain I never said it, whether as a Protestant or as a
Catholic.”

Mr. Kingsley replies: “I waive that point.”

I object: “Is it possible! what? waive the main question! I either said it or I
didn’t. You have made a monstrous charge against me; direct, distinct, public. You
are bound to prove it as directly, as distinctly, as publicly:—or to own you can’t.”

“Well,” says Mr. Kingsley, “if you are quite sure you did not say it. I’ll take
your word for it: I really will.”

My word! I am dumb. Somehow I thought that it was my word that happened
to be on trial. The word of a Professor of lying, that he does not lie!

At this juncture, and although I had already made up my mind, I finished Kane’s
piece more determined than at midpoint to forego any detailed comments on it.
Someone writing with her combination of pretentiousness and vacuousness is in a dif-
ferent world from anyone I have ever had a relationship with, much less ever pub-
lished. Nevertheless, I do proffer three suggestions for the advancement of her general well-being and mental stability.

The first is, take seriously these lines by the poet of our climate.

Hang a feather by your eye,
Nod and look a little sly.
This must be the vent of pity,
Deeper than a truer ditty
Of the real that wrenches,
Of the quick that’s wry.

The second is, read C. J. T. Talar’s description above in order to learn what is going on in Lawler’s obviously incomprehensible “tome.” Talar himself is a scholar who is at home in the worlds of Catholic Modernism and of Catholic mysticism, and has always something worth hearing, especially for a victim of the overburdened professorate.

The third is: Get over yourself!

William I. Portier

To have warded off the affliction of “conspiratorial fantasies,” and to have escaped from the labyrinth of “academic disciplines, conferences, and publishing” represented by the last contributor to this symposium—alas, no Diotima she—may be to suggest images of the great poet emerging from the inferno. But since cliché Catholicism is the bane of the book, classical imagery, however second hand (Virgil via Dryden), will be enlisted.

But to return, and view the cheerful skies,
In this the task and mighty labor lies

Portier’s contribution is the longest, as well as the most theologically wide-ranging and rich of these commentaries. It takes seriously the division of the book represented by its subtitles, “Tracking the Myths” and “Confronting the Ideologues.” Even more significant for the well-being of reader and writer is that it situates this entire discussion in the arena of civility and reason. Unfortunately, it must also begin with a minor correction. Portier writes: “At the beginning of Chapter 5, he [Lawler] summarizes what he takes to be Kertzer’s thesis: ‘out of the limelight and with the assistance of their secretaries of state, the popes regulated the anti-Semitic campaigns in the church press’” (96-97). I do not want to respond aggressively so soon in this exercise in irenicism, but there is nothing here that I summarize. The entire quotation is made by and in the words of Kertzer himself, and appears on the first page of his chapter titled, “Ritual Murder and the Popes in the Twentieth Century.”
In their public statements no pope himself would publicly charge the Jews with ritual murder, nor—in so many words—argue that they were a foreign body destroying Christian society. . . . But out of the limelight, and with the assissance of their secretaries of state the popes regulated the anti-Semitic campaigns conducted in the Church press. . . .

(The italicized passage will reappear in this discussion shortly.)

Portier then brings up two of the four accusations used to indict Pius IX, his calling Jews “dogs” and his condemnation of Judaism as the “synagogue of Satan”—all as accurately described by Talar earlier. Portier concludes his treatment by observing: “While both of these speech acts would likely offend contemporary Jewish or Christian ears, neither is, in context, an expression of anti-Semitic hatred.” I initially read this as though the context here was Kertzer’s deployment of the two narratives to prove Pius IX’s contempt for Jews. On reconsideration, it became obvious that I was wrong, and that the context referred to is the pope’s sermon which surprised Portier, and many of us, because, he “had no idea he [the pope] was capable of anything this good and patristic-sounding.”

But a less defensible position taken by Portier under the rubric, “Tracking the Myths,” is the following assertion: “In the matter of the future Pius XI in Poland, Lawler charges Kertzer with ‘the most blatant distortion of a pope’s words in the entire book,’ tampering with Achille Ratti’s [future Pius XI] final report from Poland to the Vatican [178].” However, a reader turning to page 178 will see that this blatant distortion has nothing to do with a final report from Poland to the Vatican, although Kertzer had broached that subject earlier. The passage at issue has to do with Kertzer’s doctoring a text from an Italian historian who was writing about an audience which Mussolini had with the pope in 1932, and which—Kertzer claims—proves that Pius XI’s anti-Semitism stemmed from his Polish experience. In Were the Popes Against the Jews? I spell out how Kertzer rigs his argument by changing “Judaism’s aversion to Christianity” to “Judaism’s antipathy for Christianity,” and then how he makes up, whole-cloth, this concluding passage which is no where to be found in his source.

The Pope thought that the Jews in Italy—a few of whom he had met—were basically good. But the mass of the Continent’s Jews, the hordes of Jews who lived in central and eastern Europe were something quite different, a threat to healthy Christian society, a lesson he had learned in Poland.

Kertzer describes this fabrication as “direct evidence that the Polish experience shaped the view of Europe’s Jews that Ratti would hold as pope.” Unfortunately for Kertzer’s case, there is a final contradiction that emerges. The reader will recall his observation (italicized in the earlier excerpt): “In their public statements no pope himself would publicly charge the Jews with ritual murder, nor—in so many words—argue that they were a foreign body destroying Christian society. But, in fact, the latter
is precisely what Kertzer had emphatically said in this fabricated assertion about Jews as precisely that, “a threat to healthy Christian society.”

I will not go into Portier’s treatment of what I described as Kertzer’s most offensive and most shocking violation of the truth—since it related to the papacy’s alleged refusal to save the life of an innocent Jew accused of the (putative) crime of ritual murder. For the careful and thoughtful reader that Portier has shown himself to be, the fact that he blurs this incident by complaining about the absence of “page numbers in the book’s citation” indicates at best that he was concentrating on moving away from “tracking the myths,” and on to the more controversial—from his immediate perspective—matter of “confronting the ideologues,” the second theme of the book’s subtitle.

This move entails, first, a shift in Portier’s tone to what might be thought of as le mode mineur, a kind of muted irony. “Will Kertzer use his next announced book on Pius XI, The Pope and Mussolini (236), to answer Lawler’s analysis of his book’s ‘dishonest mistakes’? Stay tuned. In the meantime, readers will want to see for themselves Lawler’s spectacular findings.” Alas, this is less Jonathan Swift and more Swift Boat Veterans—although it does manage to serve as a bridge to the critique by various academics (the “ideologues”), who are, like guilt-ridden children, obsessively preoccupied with the failure of their wartime Holy Father, Pius XII, to have spoken out as they would have liked him to speak out half a century earlier on the persecution of the Jews—as who would not have liked that?. The ramifying rays of this guilt extend to periodic petitions opposing the pope’s beatification, to the exaltation of anyone attacking him (e.g., Kertzer), to the organization of militant critics of his papacy, to the embrace of all things Israeli, and even—as we shall see—to criticism of Christianity for its adoption of the Hebrew bible.

But more importantly for present purposes, “confronting the ideologues” is also where the richness of Portier’s theological and historical insights is brought fully into play. Much of this takes place in the context of the development of doctrine regarding Judaism and Jews—as emphasized in Were the Popes Against the Jews?—that is, as represented by various papal statements beginning with the condemnation of the “Friends of Israel” under Pius XI in 1928, and continuing, however hesitantly, up to Nostra Aetate. Regarding the treatment of all this in the book, Portier observes: “After the Council, John Courtney Murray famously pointed to the question of development of doctrine raised by Dignitatis Humanae, but I am not aware of anyone who has treated Nostra Aetate on Judaism and the Church under the rubric of doctrinal development to this extent and, especially, with reference to the Holocaust.”

Portier quotes my reference to “recent theological writers who out of what I have termed ‘misplaced guilt’ are suggesting, if not agitating and clamoring for, a version of Christianity that dispenses with Christ and the church as the fulfillment of the prophets of Israel.” And, in fact, I also referred to use of the term, “supersessionism,” as “the bane of this book,” since it erodes a foundational doctrine. So, to the following genteel conclusion by Portier, the answer is a definite yes. He writes, “I read this, perhaps incorrectly, as implying Lawler’s agreement that Christ and the church do
indeed, in some real way, fulfill the prophets of Israel.” And I would say that is precisely the way to word the matter: “in some real way.” This is probably as precise as it is possible or necessary to be when what is at issue is the mystery of conscientious assent to the mysteries of faith. “Conscientious” is important here since, although this position may appear to be a kind of Catholic latitudinarianism, the ruling principle is the primacy not of the pope but of the individual’s reflective and formed conscience. And on this, the Newman texts cited in the book are totally persuasive. But I would cite a more conventional text, one that has classic standing—most recently in the writings of Michael Buckley, S.J., the philosopher of theology, or theological philosopher: “Quidquid recipitur, recipitur secundum modum recipientis”: Whatever is received is received according to the manner-style-nature of the recipient.

Nor is Portier being captious when he then points to “Lawler’s warnings against ‘absolutist’ claims’ in the Annex to chapter nine titled, ‘Anti-Semitism and Theological Arrogance,’” and published originally in 1969. Although I could fall back on pleading “youthful indiscretion,” in fact the note accompanying that annex says: “Although I would now word some of its opinions differently, I am still in substantial agreement with them four decades later.” The note concluded: “That substantial agreement takes the form of the following abridged excerpt from the article” to which Portier is presently referring.

There are doctrinal directives which constitute a negation of history and of that Incarnation which alone gives history meaning. For if history has one law it is that the full implementing of any absolutist claims necessarily entails “recourse to a means” which is incompatible with them. No contingent means can ever be perfectly compatible with an absolute end. . . . What this is saying is that in concrete reality there is no perfect embodiment of truth; every sign, even as it reveals, obscures. And man himself, a chiaroscuro entity, is obliged to give himself only to that truth with which he feels “at home,” to that truth to which he has been conformed. [In the sixties gender exclusive language was not uncommon!]

Recent controversies regarding the creature’s “knowledge” of the creator, however upsetting to those pastorally preoccupied, are rooted in a long tradition of rejecting absolutist claims to theological certitude—a tradition that began with the insight that we see now “as through a glass darkly.” But it is not merely the mystical thinkers of the so-called apophatic tradition or the “via negativa,” from Pseudo-Dionysius to Meister Eckhart onwards, who affirmed that what we know of the deity is utterly (simpliciter) untrue and only in a certain sense (secundum quid) true; it was also the “conventional” theologians, Aquinas, Suarez, de Lubac, Lonergan—and presumably William Portier—who maintained it.

Portier moves into more patently present-day controversies when he briefly takes up what is in point of fact a very brief discussion in the book as well: homosexuality. “By analogy with the church’s revolutionary change on anti-Semitism, Lawler affirms in hope that some twenty-first century pope will tell a gay or lesbian person to be proud of
their sexual orientation.” (Italics supplied) Portier is, of course, in perfect agreement about the goal, but raises what I would view as a red herring when he goes on to question whether it is wise “to analogize Jews gassed during the Holocaust and people discriminated against because of their sexual orientation.” Since I find this has the ring of a rhetorical stratagem I will answer with a rhetorical response—though free of any personal animus. I used the term “analogy” above and use it here again in its strict philosophical sense relative to something that is: “\textit{simpliciter} different, \textit{secundum quid} the same.” However, there may be something a little condescending (and thus not entirely free of the personal) in Portier’s even broaching that parallel. Stonewall is not Auschwitz.

Having said that, it is important to re-emphasize my appreciation of the intelligence and candor he has brought to this entire discussion. There is no turf-guarding, no grandstanding, no self-exaltation; just plain thoughtfulness in the service of precision, accuracy, and truth. As we have seen, and will see again, those are not universal traits in the academy. Of that, Provost David I. Kertzer provides the most exemplary instance—or, in the vernacular: he’s the poster boy.

However, a possibly rhetorical stratagem \textit{is} introduced in the next paragraph when Portier writes as follows:

“Leaving aside questions about whether Kertzer did violence to his sources, the validity of the distinction between Christian anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism is the key substantive issue of interpretation between Lawler and Kertzer.”

But the accusation that Kertzer \textit{did} do violence to his sources is in fact the key issue. To say otherwise brings us back to Newman on Kingsley in the previous chapter. (“Mr. Kingsley replies: “I waive that point.” I object: “Is it possible! what? waive the main question!”) Or it brings us to parsing endlessly the meaning of “key.” To say that Christian anti-Judaism was the seed bed of modern racist anti-Semitism is at once to voice a truism and also to admit a distinction between the two—so the issue appears to be moot. Kertzer’s problem was that he wanted to view the distinction as something manufactured by the plotters in Rome. Regardless of all that, the distinction is not a key to much of anything. The two are different phenomena; the degree to which they overlap—as they certainly do—is historically interesting, but in terms of Holocaust causality, of secondary import—which is certainly not to say negligible. Nor can one take much consolation from Arendt’s recognition of the difference between the old and the new anti-Jewishness, especially when she thinks the old version “can be blamed for the Pope’s silence about the massacre of the Jews.”

Portier closes what it would be simplistic to call a “book review” with a characteristically magnanimous reference to the final chapters of the book in the context of the discussion above on the distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.

Lawler’s defense of the distinction is consistent with Chapter 10 on institutions and their founding principles and with his developmental view of Christian anti-Semitism in the twentieth century in Chapter 8. He demonstrates conclusively that,
at a key point in his argument, Kertzer, to all appearances in service to a moral posture, has done violence to his sources. This dishonors the historical profession and renders suspect the appeal to history against the distinction, however otiose, between anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism.

He ends thus: “Were the Popes Against the Jews? intervenes decisively in the ‘anti-pioduodecimalist war.’” And I end by an observation, however otiose, that the sesquipedalian modifier of “war” was coined as an ironic expression of disdain for the unremittingly vociferous critics of Pope Pacelli.

Thomas J. Shelley

Thomas J. Shelley, who initiated the shift from subject matter to personalities by applying his GOM acronym to Lawler, may himself be represented by what yoga practitioners would call OM imagery “OM,” defined as “the sound of all the world,” resonates in the geographical trope deployed by Shelley when describing Lawler’s “maddeningly digressive style in which he rarely misses an opportunity to sail around Cape Horn when he could just as easily have slipped through the Panama Canal.”

Unfortunately, the risk in such short cuts is that one may miss the boat altogether and end up “silent on a peak in Darien”—as Shelley in effect does when he reduces to the piddling matter of a single word, “nefaste,” Lawler’s detailed treatment of Kertzer’s most oft-cited quotation, “proving” the deep-seated anti-Semitism of the future Pope Pius XI. A more unfortunate distortion by Shelley is the speedy dismissal of the last sentence in this excerpt—which I have italicized, and shall examine first:

Kertzer cites a report from Ratti to Benedict XV in January 1919 in which he referred to the Jews as “one of the most evil and one of the strongest influences” in Poland. Lawler takes issue with the translation of nefaste as “evil,” claiming that a more accurate translation would be “ill-fated” or “inauspicious.” Lawler also notes that Kertzer limited his examination of Ratti’s role in Poland to only five or six months of his three years in Warsaw as the papal emissary.

I can’t say if a preoccupation with short cuts led to this last sentence being reduced to an incidental remark, but there is nothing “digressive” about pointing out that the rigging of chronology is one of the most appalling stratagems in Kertzer’s arsenal, and one that warrants Michael Burleigh’s reference to the “shoddy underpinnings.”

1. One man’s digression is another man’s enrichment. Cardinal Newman described such rhetorical exuberance as comparable to the friendly giant strutting through the village harmlessly twirling and tossing his club, not to threaten the villagers but merely for the sheer delight of the activity. What appears as digressive to some people is, in Newman’s figuration, delight in the effervescence of life and language. One might think of Shakespeare relishing those puns Dr. Johnson derided, or of those intricate sculptures so high on a building they remain unseen by onlookers.
of The Popes Against the Jews. Kertzer makes repeated references to “the enormous importance” of Ratti’s three years in Poland, as well as to the period of “months that followed” Ratti’s message from Rome that he should “look into the reported killing of Jews.” But the span of time for which Kertzer provides the documentation of the latter goes from the date of the message itself (December 22, 1918) to the date of Ratti’s last cited report to Rome (January 15, 1919). It has to come as a shock to any reader seeking to make sense out of Kertzer’s chronology that those “months” are really less than four weeks. But even more shocking is the fact that all of the recorded communications between Ratti in Poland and the secretary of state in Rome—which are what Kertzer uses to determine why Ratti’s “experience in Poland takes on such enormous importance”—occurred during a period of approximately half a year from the time when “the Vatican librarian stepped into this background in June 1918” and up to his last recorded report on the aforementioned January 15, 1919. (As for looking into “the killing of Jews,” Kertzer with no documentation baldly says, “Ratti did nothing of the sort.”)

Returning now to the “evil Jews” and their “influence,” there are three pages of detailed analysis of this ubiquitous canard, and none of that analysis has to do with nigling over how to translate nefaste. In fact, the passage Shelley arbitrarily condenses is discussed at length precisely because it has been quoted so often—as the excerpt below indicates. (It also includes an expression of regret, here italicized, for readers past and present who might balk at all this elaborate and complicated detail.)

Although the statement refers to “influences,” anyone who has followed the narrative this far will not be surprised that there is no explanation for how Kertzer transforms that word in the first quoted paragraph into “enemies” in the next paragraph—much less for how those “influences” have that inimical relationship with “Christianity,” “the Church,” and “the Polish people.” Nor is it clear how something which is “perhaps the strongest and most evil” then becomes definitively “the most evil.” Nevertheless, what Kertzer intends to convey is clear enough from this version, which he later revised for a letter to Commonweal: “Achille Ratti, three years before becoming Pope Pius XI, reported to the Vatican secretary of state that ‘the most evil’ influence in Poland was the Jews.”

Unfortunately, to maintain this ideological perspective and to make his case Kertzer has to manipulate the language and the structure of the original text—as some wearisome exegesis will show. Concerning structure, he omits a lengthy passage (ten lines) that occurs between the first reference to evil influences and the second. Since the omitted passage pertains to “influences” on Catholics in Italy, it can possibly be regarded as only in a general way relevant to the situation of Catholics in Poland. However, its omission does make the two references to “evil” appear as not just rhetorically parallel but as identical. This juggled translation betrays the fact that the apparent parallel and identity are non-existent. The first reference was in the context of Ratti’s fear that the people “may fall into the clutches of the evil influences [cattive influenze] that are laying a trap for them.”
This is a translation which is adequate, at best, for if one took Leonardo’s well-known remark about the appearance of people’s countenances in cattivo tempo, and said that it referred to how people looked in “evil weather,” one’s suspicions about Kertzer’s devotion to accuracy would be reignited.

Moreover, the second reference about “one of the most evil and strongest influences” is in the original, “una della piu nefaste e della piu forti influenze,” which no matter how it is translated, obviously cannot be worded with the identical English term “evil.” Unless one were seeking to hoodwink the reader—a precedent established in the flagrant deletion of “the Russian ambassador” from the account of the Beilis trial—the only responsible way to determine the most accurate translation here would be to rely on the Latin root which relates to “fate” or “destiny,” and thus requires the deployment of a word that indicates such notions as “unlucky,” “unfortunate,” “ill-fated,” “inauspicious,” etc. As to those ten lines that Kertzer omitted, they described conditions in Italy where influenze pessime had prevailed. Ratti then went on to say that these influences—which had nothing whatever to do with Jews and which could scarcely even be described as “bad”—were to be overcome “by holiness [sanctificazione] and azione cattolica [Catholic Action] which are especially needed today.” Pius XI would become known as “the pope of Catholic Action,” and he was here responding to Benedict XV’s rejuvenation of a movement of social reform, then focused mainly on young people, that had been neglected under Pius X. It is in that latter context of a youth movement that the inadequacy of a univocal translation for terms related to harmful influences becomes obvious, since no one thinks a “bad boy” is identical with an “evil boy.” So, at worst or best, in relation to Jews the bishops should promote among their flocks whatever makes them holy.

Now, Shelley read all this, and while one couldn’t expect him to abridge it by even ninety percent, to say it’s all about the translation of one word, “nefaste”—that is not the equivalent of a “short cut,” it’s not even the equivalent of a baby step. As for his imagined journey through the Panama Canal, if he left from New York, this might get him as far as Lake Gatun.

Also, in Were the Popes Against the Jews? I mention briefly that the distortion of the original text regarding influences is one of the passages that figures in the critique of Kertzer by Rabbi Marc Saperstein. (Commonweal, November 23 2001). Shelley in his review, again in preemptive mode, then praises Saperstein, but in this oddly decontextualized fashion: “It is curious that so few critics have called attention to the relentlessly negative tone that Kertzer adopts toward the papacy. An exception is Rabbi [Marc] Saperstein...”—who also happens to be mentioned by Lawler half a dozen more times, along with the father and the brother. In fact, Marc Saperstein is one of the critics who originally vetted Were the Popes Against the Jews?—the book Shelley is straining to denigrate.

But it is his arbitrary speculation about the failings of “unnamed” critics to indict Kertzer for his attacks on the papacy that is now of central concern, as we draw nearer
to the end of this discussion. The complete subtitle of the book, as William Portier
reminded readers, is “Tracking the Myths, Confronting the Ideologues” (italics
added). No one reading the entire book could avoid the conclusion that it is in its final
chapters that this confrontation takes place. Shelley himself toward the end of his
review explains, unwittingly (but, as usual, superciliously), why he does find it “curi-
onous that so few critics have called attention to the relentlessly negative tone that
Kertzer adopts toward the papacy.”

When The Popes Against the Jews was published in 2001, it quickly became
apparent that this was a book that demanded a response. Lawler has tried to fur-
nish that response. Unfortunately he has been only partially successful. In the first
few chapters, through his meticulous examination of Kertzer’s sometimes ques-
tionable use of sources, he has called into question the validity of some of
Kertzer’s conclusions and raised serious doubts about Kerter’s objectivity.
Unfortunately, however, especially in the last two lengthy chapters, the book loses
focus and drifts off into a discussion of a number of irrelevant topics.

“Unfortunately” is the key term, because Shelley knows that in those final “two
lengthy chapters,” the “book that demanded a response” got precisely that through
the intervention of his fellow Catholic historians.2

In those last lengthy chapters with their irrelevant topics—some of which I
acknowledge in the Kane discussion—I treat the apotheosis of David I. Kertzer at
some length. This is a severely abridged summary of that treatment.

Kertzer has not only been embraced by the community of papal scholars; he has
in effect been greeted with the academic equivalent of all-encompassing hugs.
In 2011, he chaired “Pius XI and America: An International Conference,” con-
vened at Brown University. The scholars participating in the conference were
among the most distinguished church historians and theologians from three con-
tinents, and thus may be said to have given a kind of imprimatur to Kertzer’s
views on the papacy as essential to the rise of modern racist anti-Semitism—
and, more particularly, to his treatment of Pius XI as an ingrained anti-Semite
who had fostered priests who advocated the extermination of Jews. The confer-
ence was co-sponsored by three European institutions, the John XXIII
Foundation for Religious Studies in Bologna, the University of Münster, and the
école Française at Rome, along with Brown University, where Kerter who is
Provost played host. From all present indications no one ventured to confront
him with his rigged documents, his preposterous judgments, or his impossible
conclusions.

2. One is also entitled to inquire as to why Shelley himself didn’t respond to that demand. From the
final pages of this “review,” it is obvious he believes he knows as much or more than Lawler about these
matters.
These Catholic accolades proved so heart warming—however mind boggling to others—that Kertzer himself announced he was writing a book on Pius XI’s “co-dependent” relationship with Mussolini—as briefly alluded to earlier. This was news so uplifting that it led the present writer to exclaim, “Oh frabjous day!” as the prospect of a sequel to Were the Popes Against the Jews? appeared on the horizon.

Meanwhile, back at the ashram, the great OM is again resonating—but not as in the first instance to announce the relationship between digressions, short cuts, and the Panama Canal. This time Monsignor Shelley, did manage finally to find something more or less to commend, however begrudgingly, and definitely not in the first person. “It must be confessed that even Lawler’s irrelevant but witty obiter dicta can make rewarding reading. With regard to a tendentious recent biography of Bishop Clemens von Galen of Münster, Lawler accuses the author of introducing a new form of death “by a thousand optatives.”

I cannot say whether this confession should be greeted with a quotation from Shakespeare: “O noble judge, O wise and upright judge” or from Coleridge: “O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!” Regardless, I shall appreciatively cite several instances from the optatives ready at hand in Shelley’s own cache—although fortunately for the reader they don’t manage to add up to a thousand. These are the initial sentences of paragraphs in his account that focus on Lawler’s dicta. At the end they may not reverberate through the universe like the great OM, but they may provide a key to the perspective of the reviewer. and possibly even proffer a hint as to his evolution in the future to a more balanced assessor of the aforementioned sequel to Were the Popes Against the Jews?.

“However, he [Lawler] overlooks the fact that Vatican officials could pull hard on the leash when the Jesuits published articles that displeased them.”

“Lawler is on firmer ground when he disputes the claim that Civiltà cattolica served as a model and inspiration for anti-Semitism in the Catholic press throughout the world.”

“Lawler has a more difficult task explaining Pius IX’s homily in August 1871 when he referred to the Jews of Rome, newly emancipated from the ghetto by the Italian government as ‘dogs’ barking in the streets.”

“It is surprising that Lawler does not make greater use of Neal Pease’s Rome’s Most Faithful Daughter (2009).”

“Although Lawler does not mention it, Kertzer adopts the same dismissive attitude to Mit brennender Sorge.”

“It should also be emphasized that he [Lawler] is by no means a dogmatic defender of papal intolerance toward the Jews.”
“If he [Lawler] has not formulated the definite response to Kertzer’s accusation, he has performed an inestimable service for all future historians by providing them with invaluable materials to use in formulating such a response.”

Shelley concludes with a reference to the recently aired views of Roger Aubert and Eamon Duffy on Pius XII and the Holocaust, specifically as to “whether a less diplomatic, a more ‘prophetic’ pope would not have felt it his duty to testify more vigorously in the name of the Gospel instead of sticking to the principle of the lesser evil.” Whether these words are to be attributed to either or both historians, or are Shelley’s paraphrase matters little. The issue remains whether this line of argument contributes to a plausible case against Pius XII, since certainly the most “prophetic” pope of the century, John XXIII, was also the one with the most extensive diplomatic career.