

# **Wartime Vatican Role Debated**

## **Anti-Defamation League Takes Aim at Italian-American Pride**

**by Russ Granata**

**O**n October 25 and 26, 1992, the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) co-sponsored a conference on "Italians and Jews: Rescue and Aid during the Holocaust" at the Regent Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Beverly Hills, California. I was there, as both a Revisionist and an Italian-American, for the second day of the conference.

The NIAF, based in Washington, D.C., describes itself as a non-profit foundation "dedicated to preserving the Italian heritage and values and providing a Washington voice for the Italian American community." Among its functions are "to promote a positive and realistic image of Italian Americans in the media" and "to encourage greater appreciation of the history and accomplishments of Italians and their descendants in America." Its introductory brochure sports photographs of a galaxy of Italian Americans prominent in many fields, including Governor Mario Cuomo of New York, Associate Justice Antonin Scalia, Joe DiMaggio, Lee Iacocca, Liza Minnelli, and the late A. Bartlett Giamatti. An ADL brochure distributed there vaunted the group's role in "leading the fight against anti-Semitism," and further informed anyone who didn't already know that the ADL is made up of "advocates for Israel" who see that "challenges to Israel still lie ahead."

### **Wartime Italian-Jewish Cooperation**

At the first session I attended, held on the morning of October 26, Father Robert Graham, the American Jesuit who, according to Arthur Butz in *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, served "as the principal spokesman of the Vatican" on the stance of the Papacy toward the wartime Axis measures against the Jews, spoke on "the Italian Clergy and Hospitality to the Hounded Jews." Father Graham stressed the help that the Catholic clergy, particularly of the Franciscan order, gave in hiding Jews or aiding them to flee.

Professor Andrew Canepa, of the University of California, spoke next on the causes of the Italians' toleration of their small Jewish minority, which he laid to the Italian ability to assimilate many different immigrants through Italy's history, as well as an ability to accept ambiguity. (Professor Canepa, like all other speakers on the day I attended, avoided the touchy question of the positive, mutual affinity that Mussolini and his Fascists evinced for certain Zionists, above all Vladimir Jabotinsky, leader of the Zionist Revisionist movement and mentor of, among others, the late Israeli terrorist and premier Menachem Begin and his followers.)

### **"Enough of Ambiguity"**

After an Italian priest, Father Augusto Moretti, regaled the audience with tales of heartfelt Italo-Jewish wartime collaboration, relations between the two ethnic groups in Beverly Hills took a swift turn for the worse. Rabbi Harold Schulweis, chairman of the conference committee, said to Professor Canepa, in effect, "Enough of Italian ambiguity already. What would have been the impact on Hitler if both Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII had spoken out for the Jews?" Professor Canepa shot back that had the Italian clergy denounced the "Holocaust" publicly, they themselves would have been arrested. Father Graham hastened to support this by pointing out that no matter how desirable a statement by Pius XII would have been, the Catholic underground nevertheless came through. Rabbi Schulweis countered that, whatever the benefits of Italian ambiguity, it would have been better for the Jews had the Italians shown less of it on their behalf. He was seconded by another rabbi, Harvey Fields, whereupon an unidentified man who hurried to the dais from the audience exclaimed that Slovakia had been headed by an anti-Semitic priest (Msgr. Josef Tiso), whom the pope could have excommunicated, but didn't. After further denunciations of other Catholic nations and individuals, including Croatia, he turned to one of the priests and sneered: "They didn't do enough, but you say they did what they could!"

### **Charge and Counter-Charge**

Now the pot was really boiling. Someone exclaimed from the audience, "The Vicar of God never opened his mouth!" A papal defender retorted that Pope Pius XII had kept the proper balance, saving thousands of Jews. Someone else mentioned the 1937 anti-Nazi encyclical "Mit Brennender Sorge," but Professor H. Stuart Hughes (University of California, Santa Barbara) reminded from the dais that encyclical had been issued by Pius XI: Pius XII made no similar public statement during his pontificate. A somewhat fitful calm was restored by Father Vivian Ben Lima of India, who said that he had known Jews in school in India, and that there was none of this anti-Semitic business back there when he was growing up: "I submit that anti-Semitism is a virus that comes from a European milieu." He observed that in any case the Vatican had made significant concessions to Jewry in the years after Pope Pius XII, and with that the conference moved to another room for lunch.

After the luncheon, Anna Maria Alberghetti and Father Victor Salandini were honored with awards. NIAF Vice Chairman Arthur Gajarsa introduced the ceremony, stating among other things that the main thing to remember from the conference is that the "Holocaust" must not happen again. (Not many minutes before, this was beginning to seem a near thing!). Miss Alberghetti was introduced to much applause from the crowd. The actress of stage and cinema, still a very attractive woman (I was able to talk with her afterward), offered some memories from her wartime girlhood in Italy: an aunt had been shot by the SS, she said, and her father, a music teacher who had trained more than a few Jewish cantors, had been arrested by the Fascists. Miss Alberghetti accepted a silver proof coin commemorating the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage of discovery in 1492. I could not help noticing that otherwise no one from the NIAF mentioned that event throughout the day.

Next we were able to see and hear Father Salandini, the self-styled "Tortilla Priest," who was presented the Giorgio Perlasca Humanitarian Award for "someone who has provided extraordinary service to people in need of assistance," and named for an Italian diplomat who allegedly prevented the deportation of thousands of Jews from Hungary in 1944 (presumably by giving them, or selling them, false papers). The Tortilla Priest qualified for this award by aiding striking members of Caesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Union against lettuce and grape producers (among them Italian-Americans): he earned his nickname by celebrating a Mass in front of the home of Robert Egger, an owner of the Egger-Ghio Company, in which he employed a tortilla as the host. (Following the luncheon I caught a glimpse of Mel Mermelstein, whom I hadn't seen earlier, moving through the hotel.)

That afternoon the theme was more conciliatory, with an American Jewish scholar, Dr. Paul Bookbinder of the University of Massachusetts, and an Italian Jewish scholar, Dr. Liliana Picciotto Fargion, from the Milan Center for Modern Jewish Documentation, essentially agreeing that, all things considered, the Italian people were pretty sympathetic to the Jews, and that the real villains were the Germans. (Dr. Bookbinder noted that even today, the Germans are blaming the disturbances in Rostock and other cities on immigrants, not themselves.) NIAF official Frank Guida closed the conference, remarking that if attendees had not visited the synagogues in Rome, Milan, Florence, Palermo, and other Italian cities, they certainly should. He also claimed, "We as Roman Catholics think of what might have happened if Italy had been on the Allied side of the Second World War" (allegedly it was, at least for the last twenty months of the conflict). The last words he spoke were: "Arrivederci and shalom."

### **Atoning for Sins?**

So much for Italian pride. One wonders about how Jews would react to a similar conference, titled, let's say, "Jews and Palestinians: Rescue and Aid 1948-1993," culminating in the presentation of a Folke Bernadotte award to, perhaps, Alfred Lilienthal. And after wondering, one ventures that organized Jewry, led by the ADL, would be enraged, describe such a conference as "anti-Semitic," and castigate any Jew who participated as "self-hating."

Are Zionist groups like the ADL targeting the growing "ethnic pride" movement by attaching themselves to various European-American groups, and then using them to promote their own concerns? Might they be planning to shift these groups' emphasis from justified pride in the legitimate achievements of their ancestors (and current kinfolk) to shame for how wickedly they allegedly treated Jews over the centuries, with a wonderful redemption in prospect if they own up to the sins of their forebears, and atone for them as dutiful servitors of Israel and the Zionist-Jewish lobby?

For a refutation of the charge that Pius XII was guilty of failing to help Jews, read the following books, available from the Institute for Historical Review, Post Office Box 2739, Newport Beach, CA 92659.

- Henri Roques' brilliant, suppressed doctoral thesis, *The 'confessions' of Kurt Gerstein* exposing the key "witness" against the Pope.
- Arthur Butz's *The Hoax Of the Twentieth Century*, which includes a definitive explanation of the papal silence.
- Lenni Brenner's *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators*, which documents Zionist collaboration with Mussolini's fascist regime.

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