

Pope Pius XII: "Be proud to be a Jew!"

In a remarkable historical find, testimony has emerged revealing that, in 1941, Pope Pius XII received a German Jewish visitor at the Vatican who was seeking help for certain Jews who were being held in an Italian internment camp. After welcoming the young man and promising him help, Pius told him not once but twice--in emotional language, in front of a large group that included German soldiers--"Be proud to be a Jew."

The amazing testimony, written as a first-hand account by an anonymous Jewish author in wartime Palestine, originally appeared on April 28, 1944 in "The Palestine Post" (now, "The Jerusalem Post"), the most influential Jewish publication in the world at that time.

According to longtime "Inside the Vatican" contributor William Doyno, who discovered the testimony in an archive, maintained by Tel Aviv University, "the testimony has apparently been forgotten, because, as far as I know, no leading Holocaust authority or biographer of Pius XII has ever cited it."

As the article reports, the Jewish author attended a papal audience in the autumn of 1941. He entered the papal chamber along with numerous other people, including a group of German soldiers. (It was common for soldiers to visit the Pope early in the war era. Later, when Hitler learned of what the Pope told them, he put an end to this practice.)

The author was the final individual to approach the Pope that day. He wanted to tell Pius about a group of Jews who were being interned by Italy's Fascist government on an island, in danger of starvation. He tried to speak in broken Italian, but the Pope invited him to use his native language, assuming that it would be German. "You are German, too, aren't you?" asked the Pope. The author then explained that he was born in Germany, but he was a Jew.

Pius invited the author to finish his story. He listened intently then said: "You have done well to come to me and tell me this. I have heard about it before. Come back tomorrow with a written report and give it to the Secretary of State who is dealing with the question. But now for you, my son. You are a young Jew. I know what that means and I hope you will always be proud to be a Jew!"

Pius then raised his voice so that everyone in the hall - including the German soldiers - could hear it and said (in a "pleasant voice"): "My son, whether you are worthier than others only the Lord knows, but believe me, you are at least as worthy as every other human being that lives on our earth! And now, my Jewish friend, go with the protection of the Lord, and never forget, you must always be proud to be a Jew!"

The significance of this testimony, particularly for the cause of Pius XII, is still too early to gauge, but Doyno believes "it may well be the most explicit single testimony about Pius's personal feelings toward Jews that has ever been recorded. It is not too far removed from Pius XI's famous declaration of September 1938: "No, it is not possible for Christians to take part in anti-Semitism.... Spiritually, we are all Semites." But Doyno notes one great difference between the statements: "Pius XI's

remark to a group of Belgian pilgrims was given wide publicity and is often quoted; Pius XII's statement has been lost to history -- until now."

"For Pius XII to make this statement to a German Jew, in 1941, in private, would have been remarkable enough," continued Doyno. "That he did it in public, with his voice raised so that 'everybody in the hall' could 'hear it clearly,' in front of German soldiers, as well as cardinals, bishops and other high dignitaries of the Vatican government, is more astonishing still. It doesn't merely reveal Pius XII's kindness and Christian compassion; he goes well beyond that and affirms the young man's Jewishness, the very core and dignity of his being."

Attached below is the original article, as it first appeared in the pages of "The Palestine Post," in 1944, describing events that had occurred three years earlier. This will be followed by a full-scale commentary by Doyno, in an upcoming issue of "Inside the Vatican" magazine, in which he evaluates the importance of this testimony for Pius XII studies, recounts the story of the shipwrecked Jewish refugees, the Vatican's support for them, and gives clues as to whom the anonymous Jewish author might be -- the editors of "Inside the Vatican"

Note: the [original article](http://jic.tau.ac.il/Default/Skins/PalestineP/Client.asp?Skin=PalestineP&GZ=T&AW=1161400852468&AppName=2) can be found online by accessing the archives of the "Palestine Post," run by Tel Aviv University, here: <http://jic.tau.ac.il/Default/Skins/PalestineP/Client.asp?Skin=PalestineP&GZ=T&AW=1161400852468&AppName=2>

Follow the instructions to access the April 28, 1944 issue of the "Palestine Post," forward to page 6, and go to the article entitled, "A Papal Audience in Wartime," by "Refugee."

The Palestine Post, April 28, 1944; Page 6

A Papal Audience in Wartime

By "Refugee"

The author of this article arrived in this country in the refugee ship Nyassa.

It is on a sunny Wednesday morning in the autumn of 1941. An up-to-date Roman bus takes me from the center of the Eternal City to the Vatican. In the pocket of my dark suit I have a permit to enter the Palace of Vatican City for an audience with His Holiness Pope Pius XII.

As the bus crosses the Tiber, I can see the complex of Hadrian's Tomb. A moment later we arrive at the huge square in front of St. Peter's.

The *portal di bronzo*, leading to the Governmental Palace, is guarded by foot soldiers, who look like the lansquenets of some centuries ago. They are the Swiss Guards, and their multicolored uniforms and polished halberds and swords seem to be taken from a museum. An officer with a big moustache gives me the pass permit, the Guards take up their halberds and salute while I enter the Palace and mount a

staircase. On the second floor a footman, in tight velvet trousers, shows me into a vestibule, where about 80 people are waiting. Among them are many German soldiers, in field uniform, their caps in their hands. For about an hour I stand around or pace the parquet floor among those warriors of Herr Hitler - probably on their way to Benghazi and Tripoli, anxious not to miss the chance of taking a papal blessing with them for further heroic deeds.

After some time we are led into another hall, its walls are decorated with oil paintings, antique engravings and maps. We then pass through a corridor into another anti-chamber, and, finally we stand before huge double doors ornamented with gold.

One of the Papal under-secretaries appears and gives us instructions about what to say to His Holiness and how to behave. Then one after the other, we are allowed to enter the richly furnished hall, where the Pope receives visitors.

I am the last one to enter, after the German soldiers. The Pope, sitting in a throne-like armchair, dressed in magnificent vestments, resembles some wise doctor, a good friend. His eyes shine in a friendly way through gold-rimmed glasses as each petitioner kneels to kiss the ring on the thin fingers of the Father's right hand.

The Pope speaks to everybody--asking the soldiers in fluent German from which part of the Reich they come and whether they have a special wish. And he speaks so naturally and so simply that one cannot but feel his benevolent influence. Afterwards the Holy Father gives his benediction and hands over the petitions to his retinue: cardinals, bishops and other high dignitaries of Mother Church, officials of the Vatican Government, secretaries and diplomats. They stand respectfully in the background behind the audience chair, dressed in richly colored garments of mediaeval style.

At last it is my turn. I step forward, feeling very uneasy and shy. Then I kneel down on a velvet cushion, bow over the Papal hand, and breathe a kiss on the ring.

Then I look up and address him, stammering some Italian phrases.

But the Pope interrupts me; --"My son, you can speak your own language with me; you are German, too, aren't you?"--

--"No, your Holiness, I was only born in Germany. But I am not a German any longer--I am a Jew"--

--"So you are a Jew, what can I do for you? Tell me, my son!"--

I begin to explain why I have come. I report about the shipwrecked Jewish refugees, saved by Italian warships in the Aegean Sea and now starving in a prisoner of war camp on one of the islands. The Pope listens carefully to my explanations of how to help these poor people either by taking them to Palestine or by bringing them back to Italy to avoid epidemics and further starvation. Then Pius XII says:

"You have done well to come to me and tell me this. I have heard about it before. Come back tomorrow with a written report and give it to the Secretary of State who

is dealing with the question. But now for you, my son. You are a young Jew. I know what that means and I hope you will always be proud to be a Jew!" And the Pope raises his voice that everybody in the hall can hear it clearly, "My son, whether you are worthier than others only the Lord knows, but believe me, you are at least as worthy as every other human being that lives on our earth! And now, my Jewish friend, go with the protection of the Lord, and never forget, you must always be proud to be a Jew! -- -- --

After having pronounced these words in his pleasant voice, the Pope lifts his hands to give the usual benediction. But he stops, smiles and his wonderful fingers only touch my head. Then he lifts me from my kneeling position.....

I join the others by the wall, not caring for the expression on their faces. Have they heard it too?

Now the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, rises from his chair, spreads out his hands over us and speaks the general benediction. I bow my head.

Afterwards, after leaving the Palace, I walk alone across the piazza before St. Peter's, back to the Tiber embankment. I sit down on a bench looking at the Eternal City, at Rome, her ruins and palaces, at the Capital on which the sun shines brightly from a Roman sky.

William Doyno, a frequent contributor to "Inside the Vatican," is the author of an 80,000 word annotated bibliography on Pope Pius XII (published in "The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII" [Lexington Books, 2004]), which the "Catholic Historical Review" recently called "masterful" and "the defining bibliography on this topic." He was made aware of the archive by Dimitri Cavalli, whose monograph, "The Good Samaritan: Jewish Praise for Pope Pius XII" ["Inside the Vatican," October 2000] has won wide acclaim and is [available online](http://www.ewtn.com/library/issues/pius12gs.htm) at:
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